

SPACE GARDENS
AND
OTHER POEMS

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* Poems with an asterisk are set to music and will be available online as demos. For information contact jbalakie@usd.edu.

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SPACE GARDENS: STUDIES

Wheatfields

Milkweed-white cumulous clouds
stand on end in still space. In
suspended animation. Cloud
"puffballs." The spell of reality.
Ruisdael added the upper third
panel to enlarge his sky, so to
speak, at the seams. Midwest-like;
it surrounds and highlights the
composition. From the oblique
country road, that divides the
green-gold fields of wheat, dom-
inating the immediate landscape,
into two. To the sea margin,
almost besides the point, on the
far left, with petal-sized sails
showing. Like the traveler's road
home, my sight and sense converge
on the greens and blacks of the
silent, wooded center--and bloom
upward, in the full-bodied clouds,
in the color-and-light fast sky.

Worldview

Saw myself as Spenser (or Milton?) scanning "those argent fields," the lunar plains. "Magnificent desolation" in crisp 80-power focus in my boy's "Pioneer" refraction telescope. Like Galileo's "First light": the cratered silver-white terrain, hanging in space. Not at all jolted by the reality of a meteor-riddled, "corruptible" moon. But dazzled at the sight: silhouetted peaks, tranquil maria, boulder-strewn highlands, winding rills, rayed craters. In high-definition, as if moulded out of pure light--Though R.F. claimed (Roy Flannagan, I mean) with a sardonic shake of the head, that Milton "wished it all fit."

Production Ware

I wedge the ball of clay until
 it's plastic. Eric Satie's
Three Pieces in the Shape of
a Pear plays on the FM radio,
 in the Roshrenca's converted
 hillside barn-studio. I muse
 over the title: Tri-angularly
 viewed, Cezanne-like solid? Or
 just a joke? My eye falls on the
 plank-like planes of sunlight
 reflected off of two three-
 sided, pyramidal, slab-built
 clay sculptures, drying on
 insulation boards in one of the
 shelving units. Open-ended,
 about three feet long; their
 walls sunken in a bit. Round
 blobs of clay, plopped wet on
 the top edges, shrink up
 slowly. More Satie plays on
 the airwaves: this time, the
 first of his *Trois Gymnopédies*.
 Its abstracted, friendly
 quality lingers on, like "Me"
 peeled away to the deep core.
 I roll out the clay patties
 with a household rolling pin,
 into flat irregular circles.
 Stamp them down the middle with
 an Indian wood-block---an Art

nouveau-like ivy pattern. Place
newspaper strips crosswise, to
prevent sticking. And would
them over glass pie-plates, by
the dozens. And reflect . . .
fruit of the mind--triangular
as light.

Hill Notes II

Center Street is super-saturated with July colors. And the pillow-like clouds, sailing in fast-motion; the shoe-horned storefronts, with remodeled, plate-glass ground levels; and the skyward, full-leaved trees that blow wildly in the wind, are elongated. It's like a film without a sound-track. As if drawn by a magnet, I walk forward, by Rose's Market, Garwood Hardware, De Costa's Deli, and the Sugar Bowl, with a flower box like a baby tilted lightly in my arms. The scene dissolves: the air turns cold and still. I near a chapel: the grass-blades are coated with frost, and a mirror-like ice-path, shaped like flagstone, leads to a windowless, arched side-door. What have I got here? A Christmas gift--a doll-box cushioned with slight tissue? A bouquet of wedding flowers for--? The undersized white coffin housing the spotless soul of that five year old girl who wilted so quietly at

St. Anne's, when I was in first
grade? Inside, I can't see.
Some candle light. There's no-
where to sit. It's OK, and I
stand not knowing what I'm doing
here. Love? This . . . is
Yours?

Poconos

The air tingles, all around,
with insect-sounds. Walking,
deep in a native woodland--the
sweet vibrations thrill right
through me. The sinuous, fern-
lined trail breaks, suddenly,
on a fog-hung lakeside green,
where some cousins or friends,
in carnation pink-and-white
summer-dresses (straight out
of a Mary Cassatt portrait),
chat and laugh intermittently,
playing with a ball. Their
sounds bubble up. As I draw
closer, one voice rings above
the rest. *e flowre of hem alle*.
My heart jumps, but as I reach
out, half-mumbling I
wake, in the Pocono Mts., in
the upper bunk at my uncle's:
6 A.M. As he bangs the cabin-
door shut, and begins his
commute to his mail route in
Dover, N.J. I remembered,
then, as I lay by the screened-
window, that it was the 15th,
Our Lady's Day. In ecstasy,
like the heaven-touched, mind-
blowing trees. *J.G.D.*

Song

I woke before you this morning
And I didn't know what to do
And I thought of the new blossoms
That refuse to fall and be mine
But I'd pick one and leave it for you

I woke before you this morning
I don't know what I did
I must have gone back to bed.

Photo Op

A jagged bank of snow-white
fair-weather clouds: towering
cumulonimbus, atop a cobalt-blue
sea-view. Bobbing in place, a
fair booth, with a striped canvas
canopy, where the Roshrenca's,
to whom Mary Jane is apprenticed,
work, inside out of the sun, in
tank-tops and cut-off blue jeans.
Walrus-faced Yuri throws gutsy,
"man-sized" casseroles on his Shimpo,
and then sticks them with big
clay Hershey's Kisses for handles.
Teen-sized Dolly, like a golden-
haired gray-eyed Guinevere, drapes
huge sheets of rolled out clay over
beach balls that sit in plastic
buckets on the table; and then shapes
them, upside-down, into fluted
bowls. Just their sounds, in the
breeze-blown silences. A candid
shot: I balance 20 feet off on o
ne of the narrow floor boards that
cantilever out from the wooden stand.
And watch, camera in hand, with a
sharp eye, in the viewer.

To Ann

A windflower. Or a sea anemone.
Or your tiny, elongated fingers
cupped, elegantly, on nothing but
the air, now that you've dropped
off to sleep, and I've withdrawn
my own hand. The deepest part of
me is all of these things.
Blown-open, or vibrating, or
fixed effortlessly, it breathes,
or glows, quick with love.

Post Card

The post-card -- a detail of Mary
in Pereguino's

Child, Madonna & ss. Sebastian and J.

the Baptist .

It's tender-sweet
reality .

My friend John Swift
mailed it from a course in Seelisberg, Switz.,
dated this
August 76:

<<splashing about in the absolute .>>

I see infinite forget-me-not blue gardens
of bright
silent space

extending, from behind her, far beyond
the picture plane

--rare as the air we breath .

In blind-love, I turn my eyes toward her
repeatedly during
the day

and my golden thoughts

fly jubilantly .

13

Naturalist

A Darwin finch
 (the bird that caused all the hullabaloo)
 gathers the silver strands

 that have fallen in a circle
 around Roger Tory Petersen (of field-guide fame)
 during a haircut
 on the Galapagos.

From them it fabricates its globular nest
 100 feet away.

Museum piece?	Down-payment
	for a bird sanctuary?

Or better still
 to disseminate
 the bird's ingenious
 disregard.

Found Poem*

Standing in a boathull,
curved like a wooden
shell; taking multiple
shots, while turning
meticulously left to
right; then swinging
the camera around to
make another sweep,
in ever-smaller arcs.
The end-result: in
full scope, a fleeting,
photomural beachscape;
with a sensation like
"floating above the
scene," in a cone of
water and sky.

*See *Life*, August 1983, "Camera at Work: David McGlynn."

From Life on Earth*

Daguerreotype-like, the fossil shines on the rock when it's tilted at the right angle. Superb detail--the bristles can even be counted. Segmented-animals--e.g. trilobites, the impressions intact of the chiton and calcium carbonate shells. They would be shed--their body armor--to grow. X rays reveal muscle fibers and compound fossilized eyes. High definition. Spherical vision--like that Escher print or a "fish eye" lens. Sight--in a single calcite crystal.

*David Attenborough's TV series.

Take Off

On the yard-wall, below my 2nd story window, I saw John Swift looking up playfully: his eyes elliptically shaped and fuselage blue. He reminded me of a Brancusi sculpture, with its streamlined and polished features. Or, M. Escher's alter ego: a buddha-like stylized bird, in *Another World*. Viewed from a triad of perspectives (made from three wooden blocks), it perches on the ledge of a brick arcade, erected on a lunarscape, with rippled sandhill-like craters, and a cosmic backdrop. In a three-piece suit, John smiled up at me. He was back, surprisingly, from a conference where "East meets West" in Interlaken, Switzerland.

Hill Notes VI

i found you
not long after my footsteps sounded
like broken pipes ghost-chains
and boxes on the metal stairway,
scrubbing and
scouring with your bare knuckles and
too closely snipped or bitten
fingernails paint and glue adhesive
paper from
the lighthouse floor . . . you were in your
smock and
i told you to be careful of the
mousetraps--scummed
white water on the summit level
of a hill washed almost
you away but i held both your hands
hers and yours
and i didn't even feel any sweat .

Grapebowl

Still Life With Grapes
 (1926). Dappled light on
 the low glass-bowl--a
 pedestal base. Sequin
 sparkle in the foreground,
 the lower half of the
 photograph. A <<Rendition
 of matter into music.>> The
 black fruit brimming, over
 the brow, onto the table-
 top. Glamorized. The
 material translated into
 abstract commercial beauty.
Enfant cheri of Vogue--Baron
 de Meyer. Intoxicated with
 fragile spectacles. A high-
 key world. Full of star-
 light effects.

like a watermark

or

cipher

.

*

For J. B.

```
"Catfish" (my friend John Banasiak's
           nickname )
```

kicked up ringing bits & pieces
of

Ming pottery

everywhere in the thick, skin-like
 dust

of the Forbidden City

```
( while on
  sabbatical
  in '87 ),
```

like the green-glazed scales or
bone shards

of a blazing red-eyed dragon

```
--relics      scattered over
```

Beijing

: "the China below

the

surface"

The Waterfall
(or 51 Mill Street)

In sleep--expanded consciousness, and the sound of a waterfall, cascading fabulously through space. The colliding particles of water, sun-tinted. bubbling. Beating in my ears, like a cloud of fleeting wings. Mind-boggling. As if the Escher lithograph, hanging on the wall, had come tumbling out over the bed into reality. The draftsman-like *Watervall*. A raised mill-house stands--in a stepped, Tibetan-like landscape--fitted with a railed walkway, and adorned by an exotic sea-garden, inhabited by branching coral plants and huge polyps. A viewer, leaning backward, muses over the water, zigzagging down a right-angled, one-story aqueduct, constructed of three interlocked triangles, and flanked by two cubed towers. But, through an optical illusion, it finds its way,

without ever seeming to
climb, to the top of the
circling mill-wheel, where
it drops off. Effortlessly,
in this terraced Paradise.

For T. W.

The house-windows are glazed
with feathered ice-patterns
that resemble fossilized
plants, like primeval Ice Age
ferns. They remind me of the
super-fragile work of the
Finn, Tapio Wirkkala. He
studied the multi-faceted
icicles, dripping glacial-
caves, and frigid quicksilver
brooks of Lapland, gleaning
ideas for his glass-designs.
His El Dorado: a solid world
of crystallized diamond-
light.

Hill Notes VII

the faucet water is much colder

 window screen spaces have filled in

 with pieces of snow
 like a honeycomb;

cells.

 the solid wood shutter

the plaster which is drab and cloud blue.
 i like it

 like this - too much has been a matter

of choice. mindfulness. blindness. the
 taste sickens for a
 while in my mouth when

 i
 think about all the half
unintentional
 lies
 i feel i know better

 the colder the room gets as i wake .

Eight Easy Pieces

Nothing like the joy of dance:
P. Martins' *Eight Easy Pieces*.
Like schoolgirls at their paces,
a trio of ballerinas, in satin-
rose, lavender-blue and dusky-
green Greek tunics, dance to
the sublime broken tones and
rhythms--"a step for every note."
Stravinsky's score, all thumbs
and genius. A circus gaiety to
which the dancers, in silver-
white slippers, step briskly,
with acrobatic grace. His
mentor Balanchine's real love of
the female spirit through its
form, or vice versa? In the
finale, they twirl, jointly on
their toes, like a prism-colored
flower, in circles.

Lunch Hour

The grotto had an otherworldly look,
as if it was carved out of moonrock.
It stood, in relief, in the park-
like green-world, that Mr. Saporito,
the custodian, maintained, beside
St. Anne's Church. Weightlessly,
the cherry, pink and white flakes
showered, like a windfall, from the
fully laden trees. They flew all
around as, in a flurry of words,
Danny led John Nees and me in a
hurried lunch-hour rosary--the hand-
fuls of petals we'd tossed, far as
we could over the railing, clogging
the motor-driven pool at the
Blessed Mother's feet and causing
it to flood. Standing on a chip
from the self-same stone, given
to Father McHale by the aged Lucia,
Mary looked out from Fatima sweetly
on Garwood, a plaster and paint
apparition.

Beaton's World

In Osbert Sitwell's words,
"simple or orchidaceous flowers."
Cecil Beaton's constellation
of Lily Elsie portraits. This
one dated 1920--at the beginning
of "the long weekend." She's
framed by a painted background of
fringed clouds. A full-length
fur accentuates her sinuous build.
Hands on hips; tilted head crowned
by a feathered, wide-brimmed hat;
wispig hair; finely curled lips.
It all bespeaks her elegant
emancipation. Beaton's equip-
ment? A booby-trap ladder and
tripod; and a *Kodak*, light-
tight in pink tulle.

Hillnotes III

Late fall--my nose tingles
at the smell of the extra-
apples I put on the windowsill
to keep cool. Aurelius Hall--
the old seminary overlooking
the Latrobe Airport, and the
Laurel Highlands stretching,
at a diagonal, westward. My
roommate's dufflebag and army
surplus coat appeared myster-
iously in the closet. Shared
space. From the shelf I take
the shoebox, holding my things,
and dig out the drugstore
Kodacolor-print of my sister
Nancy, her strawberry-blonde
hair shimmering in the natural
light. It was taken by uncle
Mickey one Sunday, out front,
with the old Brownie box camera,
in the plastic alligator case.
She fingers, half-smiling, a
long-curling, pink-and-white
streamer of the cherry blossom
tree, in flower, like a May
Queen's cape, all around her.
Sweet 16. Through the umbrella-
like branches a gleaming retinue
of parked Fords and Chevys trails
to a vanishing point behind her,

down Willow Avenue. A world
turned upside-down, it seems now,
like the inverted image in the
thick glass viewer: our last
spring together in Garwood. I
lean the photo against the jar
of flowers sitting on my desktop,
a few slender chrysanthemum stalks
I bought at the Greensburg
Florist's, leftover from my
"initiation" on Friday. And the
bag of fruit. The wakefulness--
a feeling of being home, forever
and always. I told you, about this.

Dirge for a House-Mouse

Sleek, wee trembling beast
 captured sidelong in a STICK-EM
 glue-trap
 ("No Springs. No Snaps")
 its pointed fuzzy ears
 twitching, as i turn on the
 light, a sad sight, with
 greasy fur, and teeny-tiny
 glimmering brown-eyes--
 the culprit that pulled the
 stuffing from a
 threadbare coat,
 where she planned
 to build a nest.
 I pick it up, and it tugs
 weakly at my
 breast.
 My wife, a farm girl,
 accusing me
 of timidity
 fills
 a yellow bucket
 with water,
 boasting at our catch--
 as something squeals and squeaks
 inside me.

J.'s dream #33

. . .
Behold - I am with thee.

a ladder on the screen

like the word

I
L
L
U
M
I
N
A
T
I
O
N

is cast in front of me.

J. C.

Circulating down the Guggenheim's spiral gallery, I saw a man in a tweed jacket, with a red-bandanna around his head, on the opposite level, pulling the foam-rubber padding out of a threadbare sofa-chair. In a lion-like crouch, he hugged and heaved the puffed-up, spongy, fungus-colored stuffing, turning it in upon itself. A pony-tailed TV crew scrambled to catch it all--the raw footage flashing silently on the monitor in the central well. I didn't know who it was, but other junk-like, crumpled "soft-sculptures" sat all around, in a row, like *Looking Glass* sized toadstools that had sprouted from the sanitized floor. With involuted, mind-like, organic folds-and-spaces.

Sign*

The *Giotto* probe--a flying,
high-tech magi. Swinging off
of the globe for a March '86
rendezvous with the "Broom Star,"
Halley's comet. Light-robed;
illustrious. Life-study for G. di
Bondone's nativity fresco, adorned
with his priceless-golds, shell-
pinks and sky-blues--its elongated
ellipse, like "crystal tresses,"
looping by as it did in 1304. The
blazing Star of Bethlehem. But
now, the master's eye is wired to
take high-resolution, digitalized
pictures; and to detect multiple
frequencies--the color-spectrum
from infrared to ultra-violet--and
radiocast the findings back to
earth. While other Giottos rub
their eyes at the prodigy--a light-
shower, the fantastic stroke of
the tail and nucleus.

*Launched by the European Space Agency.

Handler Mfg.

Jumping, I clutch the top of the obliquely angled, 9 foot high brick-wall, and pull myself up in time to see the train barrel by, yards away. The industrial zone, through the center of Garwood, bordering on the railroad tracks. A sun-hot Wednesday afternoon. Digging out for three sweltering days ashes and half-burnt pink, green and yellow invoice slips from in and around the outdoor incinerator: trash left by the previous occupants. My first summer job, at Handler Mfg., a newly leased factory on the Westfield town-line. On Monday morning, I dreamt that Uncle Johnny, in Wilkes-Barre, called me down to the tracks, outside the wall, where we moved a ladder-like length of steel-rail. Déjà vu? Later that day, a full-time co-worker, also named John, who says "hen'na?" a lot too, brought me here, out back, and put me on the job. Paint fumes, from the nearby ventilator shaft, burn my eyes. The boss--the owner's son-in-law--came down a while ago and said, it's not a government project.

Initiation

On an overnight trip to Pittsburgh, from our schools. Staying with her high school friend Stephanie, whose fiancé was called Mark. Mary Jane said I could take a shower with her. Like the film, *Arabesque*--Gregory Peck hiding behind Sophia Loren: her tantalizing back and hips fully exposed. She washed herself, like she meant business Afterward, from the parlor couch, our under-sized bed, I heard Stephanie grunting and sweetly groaning and hyper-ventilating. In vain, Mary Jane holding her hands over my ears.

Visitation

I wake, while yet asleep,
in sunlight, in my sister's
old room, on Willow Avenue.
A faultless piece of
reality! The clean-edged
dormer angles; the spotless
painted surfaces; the
sparkling rosewhite bed-
linens; the gauze curtains,
flapping soundlessly.
Perfect detailing, down to
the plastic mail-order
angel, hanging above the
headboard, her bronze-gold
wings sweetly unfolded. The
space itself seems to live
and breathe. Suddenly, I
see a dazzling, full-leaved
tree, branching upward, at
the front window; its limbs
balancing effortlessly in
the transcendental blue.
Beauty of summer. Mirror of
my being. It dances in the
invisible, inaudible, tran-
quil wind. Pure freedom,
in epiphany.

New Light

Michelangelo's serene-
light--
breathing
lyrically
on the Sistine Chapel
ceiling----

now that the accumulated
animal glues, dis-
solved salts, greek-wine
and candle tallow
have been painstakingly
removed
with applications of
de-ionized,
distilled H₂O
--the colors rainbow-glorious
again,
and showing, incidentally only,
the slight arc of indentations
where
his fingertips, lightly-touching,
tested
the plaster .

Glass Shop

Like a Greek Kore
come to life--Hallie,
Mary J.'s friend, stood
in the Polaroid
tacked to the panel
of her studio space--
totally disrobed, one leg
slightly bent at the knee;
her hair combed back,
as if wet.

But it disappeared
from the time

I watched her assisting Mary J., behind sandbags,
in a bunker, twirl

and shape a rod with almost oozing
molten golden-orange
silica

for a project in a guy

named Fritz's class,
to when we left--with the gas-jets, as always,
kept on.

The oblong fruit-like glass-piece,
cooled,
like fine crystal before
our eyes, to candy-apple red.

But I felt a void.

Ripley
[To Sigourney Weaver]

Housed at the end
of *Alien*

in an air-tight,
ovoid hibernetics-pod--
its lid curved
like
an eye lens,

Ensign Ripley
sleeps suspended

in sidereal time
like a missing
star-tossed
princess

her vehicle floating
like
a silver-drop,

a crystalline sea-egg,

in the tranquil

immensity--

where flowers
of silence
surround her.

Memento

Visiting in Wyoming Valley,
Pa.--old mining country,
bounded by monolithic hills.
Sitting in the familiar cracker-
box living room, a treasure-
house of family associations.
But I see, for a second, a sun-
like burst of light, followed by
a fuming mushroom-cloud--a puff
towering over Hiroshima, in stark
newsreel black and white--as my
Uncle Johnny retells the days at
Tinian Island, where he was a
ground chief; showing me the
TOP SECRET color-coded engineering
plans for the B-29 Superfortress,
with its 141 ft. wingspan, four
42,200 hp engines, 30,000 ft.
ceiling, 5,332 mile range, and
brand new bullet-proof glass
turrets. They knew something
was up, because these "old guys,"
in their 30s, blew in with a
secret cargo. He saw Enola Gay
take off--And says he'd kiss
Truman's hand today. It was
a passport home.

Life-in-Death

Dog-tired, climbing blindly,
my eyes rolling in night;
slipping and tripping up a
rutted, steeply-graded old
roadbed. Till, suddenly,
I'm at the top where I can
see in a cloudbank to the east
colored-bars of glowing light
--blood-orange, Bermuda green,
slate-blue. But, it feels like
something is watching me, out
of the corner. A slow-pan to
the right, where in a new light
I face a chilling tableau:
a ragtag band of men, all
but bones, in tattered red,
white and blue uniforms;
propped up on twisted sticks
and rusty muskets. Their jaws
locked in grins; stone-cold.
They stand on the roadside
grass, by a Pennsylvania Gas
pipeline and shed, like those
I've seen on the Roshrenca's
property. Out in front, the
tallest, with a huge bone-
skull, grips a broken flag-
staff in his long splint-
like hands. Petrified, I see
his eyeballs, still sparkling

in their deep-set oval sockets:
Life-in-death! I shake myself
free and bolt down the other
side of the densely wooded hill,
until I come out in a circle
of suburban houses, built
around a silver lake--brand
new tri-levels with basement
garages, picture windows, and
ornamental trees. No one is
up yet. The sun bursts in
gold shoots and streamers as
I approach running and,
despite myself, shouting,
shouting for joy.

July 1976

Water Study

The pure feeling
 of Da Vinci's curvilinear studies
 of eddies and falls;
 like the meticulous blossoming
 of his Bethlehem Star plant
 --but here, the gravity which pulls
 the motile water
 down a
 conduit,
 giving rise,
 on the perimeter, to spinning
 waves
 that circle and unfurl
 and curl
 in on themselves--
 a stirring swirl of water-blown
 bubbling-flowers .

 Fine spun as
 dandelion
 seeds; or electrical
 fields
 .

First Stop

Straight from Heathrow,
I drove the rented Peugeot

off the M6, when the
windshield wipers short-
circuited

in a rain-shower,

and onto a country lane in Kent,

with one hand out the
side window trying to rub the glass
clear with
tissues.

Finally, I made a last-ditch turn into a
layby -- where I sat,

disgusted, till the bold yellow sun
appeared along with

the whole length
of a
double rainbow,

like the one Constable dissected
"drawing the prism and calculating the angles,"
at Hampstead,
but which was resurrected here, in the field
opposite
in living, breathing colors,
behind a
hedgerow .

3:33

the Himalayan
range

out back --

beyond the fenced cliff,

disappearing
one cut
at a time --

like shaded pixels on a monochromatic
screen --

rugged moon-like heights,

a jagged chain

of far-flung

peaks .

Receding

before my eyes; reversing

in (geological) time.

Days

Just the other day
as I was talking to a friend
your name came up.

And he said you had
an air about you
and maybe it's because
you're from back east.

But I didn't think you'd
take an interest
so I never said
a thing about it.

On Sunday as we talked
around the table
you mentioned Katmandu.

And David said he had
a chance to go there
while in England
with a friend.

But there wasn't time
to obtain their visas
so they missed the
rhododendrons all in bloom.

This morning as I was
walking to my office
I stopped by your front yard.

And I was taken by the
quantity of leaves
that lay in patterns
on the grass.

All the brilliant colors
blown at random
resembled for all the world
a persian rug.

Exposure

J. B. showed me
 a boxful of slides
 he'd "borrowed"
 while in Seelisberg--

including
 the original of the 8 X 10 inch
 blow-up
 of Maharishi.
 on my desk:

Standing,
 flower-laden,
 in full sun--

the Alps rising like waves
 in the background,
 or frozen EEG patterns;

the ribbons of air
 hanging

in the sea-blue heights
 of the troposphere;

here and there
 rills

trailing like silver-mercury
 down along
 the rockscape .

The next one was a close-up,
 taken
 at the same spot,

reminding me of
finely painted
Elizabethan miniatures--

the untainted light;

followed by some others
shot in sequence.

But when I

asked could I
make copies,

Jim turned his head, holding up
a gleaming silver-gold
transparency,

and said

<<I'd better put them back.>>

Guest

Twin images: the soft bangs,
and soulful eyes of Alice Liddel,
Dodgson's tiny Victorian muse;
and A. N., twenty-something,
with traces of the Yurals in
her high-cheeks bones and oval
face. I walked with her to
and from her campus lectures;
stopped once or twice to buy
carnival-colored ice cream from
the Baskin-Robbins bins (where
she said she worked once). But
that last night, as she lectured,
I saw something several feet
above her: it was spherical
and blazing sea-blue, like Neptune.
It moved as she moved, in
front of the black-board, like
clockwork, always staying exactly
with her. I studied it, thrilled,
like trying to dissect a soap-
bubble. Pure guesswork
I didn't say anything, the fol-
lowing weeks, in my calls to
Springfield: afraid that she'd
think I was *off the wall*!

Worlds

Especially on days like
these, I would lug out my
dad's horn-covered photo-
album, big as a telephone
book, the pages bound to-
gether by black shoe-
strings, and sit on the
floor pouring over the
chemically faded blue-grey
photo-images, evenly
placed, neatly spaced and
labeled. As the shining
ribbons of rain fell all
around our dripping, tree
and shrub grown suburban
cottage in Jersey, I
flipped through worlds
within worlds: the sun-
blown flying fish fan-
tailing in the Pacific;
the clunky junk-boats
lumbering on the Yangtze;
primeval orchid-hung water-
falls in Burmese jungles;
the cobras in Calcutta
with bejeweled hoods; the
pearl-white Taj Mahal,
cloud-like and serene. But
I gazed most at the shots
he took of the Himalayas over

the B-25's wing-tip. The
rugged glaciated topography,
colossal heights, rock-
falls, sheer peaks. A
huge antediluvian silence
hanging in the air--like
the Everest, more breath-
taking still, now fixed
in my mind.

Art Spot

A yellowed newspaper clipping of

Dolly Roshrenca

balancing a massive stoneware
platter

on her shoulders -----

crazed with salt-stains and nebula-like
 splashes
 of glaze;
and surrounded by coiling, snake-like handles .

Her arms arc around the circular
 ,moon-like piece

like a figure
in a
Greek frieze;

or on a Mycenaean vase .

A special picture-spot in the Sunday *Parade* featuring

Pittsburgh artists .

She's dressed in a leather-vest, and black turtleneck - - her sleek blonde-hair

parted down the middle,

accentuating her

oval "cameo" face.

Flash of irritation

in the stone-grey

eyes? Bugging at the weight----

the godlike allusion

.

Lost Prospect

A newly graveled side-road at the back-end of town, out beyond Unami Park. It leads to a trio of denuded mountains, that look like a rugged Taoist landscape. A derrick is in full swing. With several other wide-eyed residents, I climb to the top of a construction-site sand-hill. Before us, a brand-new prospect opens up: a sea of jade-green deciduous trees extends in all directions, all but hiding the grid-like pattern of tract houses. A lost primeval forest? Though I missed it before, Garwood, Cranford and Westfield, the three adjacent towns, are embedded together, without town-lines or boundaries, below a sweep of Georgia-O'-Keefe-blue sky.

Bed

When I was seven
I dreamed of a bed
In a sunken living room
Up in the air.

It was studded with jewels
And covered in gold
And scarlet fabric--
It shone like the sun.

A dazzling object
Fit for a queen
In a modern apartment.
A museum piece?

A bed of wonder!
That betokened the love
Of a blessed Lady
Without compare.

Down steep city-corridors
Silver bells rang
From a cathedral with spires
That pierced the clouds.

Their sound rose within me
As I woke with a thrill
At finding a treasure
Buried deep in my heart.

One Sunday

My meditation was like
swimming through water
smooth as silk. Toward
the end, I was engulfed
by light with a *woosh*,
like a solar wind, and a
figure, plain as day, hung
effortlessly in a luminous
sea of colorless space.
About 2/3 of it was within
my field of vision: it had
upward-curving dihedral
wings, that arched outward
from its rounded shoulders.
Its skin looked molded out
of light, like polished
marble. It rocked above
me, just like a tree in a
summer breeze, looking for
all the world like M.
Schongauer's *Gabriel*
engraving on that Christmas
card L. T. sent. But then
it was gone, blown away
like a silver-web. I came
out of it, tingling
Climbing downstairs, for the
potluck, I saw Dominic, a
pre-med student, through the
glass-paneled inner door.

He was waiting, reading a textbook. And I recalled how the other week everyone ran to the opposite side of Mill Street and posed, laughing, below a multi-colored fluorescent loop of rainbow, that extended just behind them all, above the hillside rooftops, as I clicked their picture. . . . But now, entering the sitting room, a blast of wind shook all the single-paned house-windows; and Dominic's eyes popped up as he saw me and said, looking thrilled, how much he liked studying here.

For Ann

I swing wide the U-Haul doors,

but would

take the bluebirds, the night-rain,
and the bank of deptford pinks
into it

--like granting you 3 wishes.

Our truckload of implausible valuables

headed West .

Longview Heights

A UFO, or shooting summer star?
Hurtling headlong over Ohio?
It takes me back to the Bender's
backyard, on Harding Place.
The four of us, in sleeping
bags, talking till all hours.
And spotting, in reality,
Telstar or Sputnik in transit;
fleeting, light-reflecting.
A robust silver-winged bird,
at orbiting altitude. All
around, the constellated
nightscape--like brilliant
umbels of Queen Anne's lace.
The huge gardens of deep-space!
Circling, in celestial-time.
Since then, it's the first
satellite I've seen. Sending/
receiving. It's a part of me.
Love--its fabulous trajectory.

Show News

Life-sized china dolls--
centerpieces for her big
dream, a New York City
show, in a Soho gallery.
The yellowed newspaper-
clipping lines a shoe-box
for "returns" in the Ohio U.
slide library. M. Walker-
Brent now? Married that
Playboy photographer--the
day she left, showed me his
contact-sheet, in which she
posed disrobed like Betty Biehn
in an arbor. Giant replicas,
porcelain-white. Outfitted
in embroidered skirts and
headdresses with flaps.
Mute, baby-like, on the
page--modeled on antiques,
in childhood, given her by
her great aunt.

The Walker

3

phone booths
 beside a curvilinear
 silver and red chrome
 art deco diner .
 Estes' quasi-trinity,
 off-center , with
 retractable doors and
 suspended directories ,
 is a mass
 of abstractions:
 a welter of
 stellar
 glass & metal reflections ,
 in transfigured
 spaces
 .

World's Fair

The Tuscan marble

Pietà

passes into view

behind a bullet-proof
glass screen .

Ramps carry spectators by the twos

--who look as if locked

in a blue ice-block .

My father boasted

how engineers at the Koppers' plant

designed the unsinkable crate

that housed it

on the trans-Atlantic trip over,

packed with

polyethylene
beads,

like those I found sometimes

in his socks,

like granules

of hard snow .

Not bound,
but free— I see the

effortless love
of the ever-youthful Mary
circling around
the weightless
body
lying in the
graceful draperies
of her lap -
The glass wall throws back
the blinding light
as my camera
snaps and
flashes.

Late Arrival

John Swift's fish-tanks,

 six gurgling 20 g. lighted-aquariums,

 hide the walls of their otherwise dark
 Norman, Oklahoma
 rental ,
 stacked three-high.

They house
 dragon gobies, orange
 chromides,

 electric-blue tetras;
 fanning silver-black
 angels;

and his pride gold and blue
 Haplo Chromis venustus

 (which he breeds and trades
 for other varieties) .

All real "darlings," in their

 algae-green worlds of swooning fronds,
 serene rock
 spaces .

I arrived late,

 but sank, into an arm-chair my thoughts

swimming like the silver - rimmed,
 rising
 bubbles,

in silence.

**After the Family Reunion
(183 Roosevelt Street)**

Full inside. Lying up-stairs,
on the old brass-bed, where dad
and my uncle Johnny and Henry slept.
Looking through closed eyelids,
up into the void--3 a.m. Back
from my cousin's; St. Sedgewick's
Bazaar, in Sugar Notch. Suddenly,
in the deep-night, colorful
light-strands appear. Dazzling
filaments, glowing like capillar-
ies or fine tubes. Quivering,
in fabulous patterns: elaborate
"cats cradles" of laser-like
coherent light. They flash by, a
slide-show of subtle, heterotic
configurations: starfish pink
and orange; anemone-blue; silk-
worm green; citrus yellow; coral
red; hyacinth-white. Super-strings;
threads of pure being! Marvelous
elastic webs of light. That seem
to hold the silence. As I watch,
in sheer elation. With new sight.

Giverny*

the circulating shades of color,
a tangle of cool and warm hues, from farther
back
take on substance
as blue-gray disks, trimmed with red and
egg yoke
yellow,
begin to float on
the violet-water, in their
own shadows with a
streak of sunlight highlighting the panel
like a sundog .

*Based on a Monet above my bed.

Heirloom

the fir tree
with its spirelike crown

stands as if suspended-in-time

in the far corner of our Garwood living room--
its aromatic evergreen
scent

hanging in the silent air.

But the "tree of blisses" is bare--

though its branches sparkle in the crystallized
window-light .

And it reminds me
of that Medieval dream-poem--

an enigmatic tree of "signal bliss,"
of brightest wood;

treasure-bearing

--the silver-green rood .*

*Clement A. Miles, in *Christmas Customs and Traditions*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1976) points out that "The Cross in early Christian poetry was conceived as the Tree of Life planted anew, bearing the glorious fruit of Christ's body Sometimes Christ himself was regarded as the tree of Paradise" (272-272).

AIRPLAY

Safekeeping

Encased in opaque blue plastic,
tucked inside
his wallet
with his driver's license
and credit cards,
the fragment of St. Theresa's
clothing
in secret hides
that at first I thought
was a living bit
of hair or bone,
though I couldn't really see it
through its protective coating.
With my grandmother's blessing
he took it overseas, the cherished relic
of her "Little Rose."
And carries it with him to this day--
in the gumlike resin covering
in which he put it
while at Koppers--
like a precious piece of those
mysterious,
charmed seas or skies.

Family Heirloom

Iridescent as a floating soap bubble, the hand-blown glass lemonade pitcher sits on the table, with its tall, elegantly proportioned body, and a swan's-neck handle. My wife was bringing it back with other family heirlooms from Greenwood, Illinois when a blast of wind, on Route 90 near the Rochester exit, overturned the Ford Tempo from the University fleet, driving at 65 mph on cruise control, and rolled it four times down the highway--a harrowing feat. The seat belt saved her, the news crew said, using footage in a story about the state's new "buckle-up" law that evening. And, remarkably, in one piece, the streaked, gold-tinted family antique, sits on the dining table like a blown glass rainbow.

Dale Evans

I dreamn't I saw Dale Evans
on her California ranch
talking about religion
shining with her faith

busloads of chattering tourists
rolled in all day long
and visited the buildings
the stable and the house

and I wanted to meet Roy Rogers
and suddenly there he was
wearing his tan fringed jacket
his neckerchief and hat

and I wanted to know about Trigger
and where the shows were made
on the lots of some big studio
or in their own backyard

aut Dale interceded
and took us all around
smiling and remembering
all those blessed times

and I wanted to see Roy riding
across the open range
like the footage that was spliced each week
between commercial breaks

but Dale had come between us
and now she pointed to the door
and I came out near the double R corral
where Nelly Belle was parked

You Came To . . .

you came to my room
unable to sleep
and though it was late
I said to come in

we stood there at first
before sitting down
you wanted to talk
I gladly obliged

I saw there was something
that weighed on your mind

we talked for awhile
about different things
that never came up
then I got an idea

I said you could stay
all night if you liked
I thought it would help
but before I explained

you got into bed
looking relieved
I laid on the couch
and said pleasant dreams

but you'd already dropped
into a sleep

I lay in the night
mindful of you
and thought of the stars
that hung all around

now I said to myself
it would all be all right

Trip

I trip

slipping on the jagged
footloose plates

of the abandoned anthracite
coal-heap,

a waste deposit of black slate
from the old Wilkes-Barre
mining days.

They're like blank tablets piled high above Wyoming

Valley, PA--

with the Sullivan Trail highway;
grandma's house in Edwardsville; and my
Uncle Henry's two family home in
Sugar Notch,

out of reach of sound or sight.

A hodgepodge of broken blackboard
slabs--tipping slightly, long
forgotten,

surrounded below by wild blackberry bushes.

My dad poking around; me skipping up and down, until

he calls me and pulls apart,
like a blueblack missal,

two halves disclosing
the italic impression

of a primeval
fossilized-fern .

Exhibition

Mary Jane's viking outfit. She fired the two shell-like cups with holes--the "salted" stoneware claybody splashed with a white-matte glaze, --and then laced together the pair of frosted objects with leather boot-strings. She also assembled from wheel-thrown and hand-made parts a horned bowl-like helmet, dipped in celadon, which she afterward padded with foam. For the "shoot" she wrapped a dappled rabbit skin from the house provocatively about her waist, and slipped on her summer shoes with long leg straps. She posed for me in Yuri Roshrenca's home-made kiln, one hand on her hip, the other resting on the unbricked doorway. Somehow I don't have the negatives, but the silver-gelatin prints I took were made into postcards to announce the show, and were then displayed at her exhibition. She thought it was a big "hoot" when later I entered them in a 3 Rivers Arts Festival photo contest--the woman accepting submissions insisting that I get the "model" to sign a waiver, which she did on the spot.

Smithsonian
(Easter 1963‡)
 the titanium pod

that parachuted to safety
 like a silver milkweed seed,
 sat there at the air museum
 as a long line
 of people threaded past
 the fireproof hatch--
 10,000 a day.

And as I stepped up to see
 inside the Mercury
 spacecraft
 through the only porthole
 when it came my turn,
 I deftly clicked the shutter of my Kodak camera
 and the blue-cube flashed
 illuminating
 the 36 sq. ft. of habitable space
 inside Friendship 7,
 (with its 56 toggle switches)
 where John Glenn
 rode--
 silver-suited,
 the human payload.

‡ The flags in Washington were at half-mast for the Thresher disaster.

Mandalay

Mandalay

"where the old flotilla lay" in Rudyard Kipling's poem,
 looked like it was suspended
 from one of the barrage balloons
 meant to deter our low-level strafing
 or bombing.

I saw it while raiding Gokteik,
 not far away,
 from my plexi-glass tail-gun turret
 in the B-25 Mitchell.

The crew hated to return--we lost at least
 one plane
 on each bridge-busting
 mission there.

I don't think we bombed Mandalay itself--but
 we dropped
 thousands
 of maple-leaf
 pamphlets .

The Old Woods

Myrtle Avenue, the new part added when I was 10, has been "reclaimed." Pine trees and grass banks shelter the three remaining, original houses on the other end of the block. The pavement and backyards have been replanted to their wild state. That woods-within-a-woods, of snaking trails; cinder-heap "burial mounds" deposited by the horse-drawn wagon from Thatcher Furnace; the twisted Tarzan-like vines; the swamp where we'd play ice-hockey, in our shoes, for hours; the tree-lookouts, nailed with wooden slats, for ladders--it was all plowed down in the space of a week for the subdivision. It's back now, though her house, unexpectedly, still stands--one of the candy-colored new comers. And I walk by, slowly, dying for a word.

Sunday Afternoon in the Den

The gold-trimmed string blinds

hang loosely

on three sides

in the closed den windows

except the fake one
to the kitchen

with the painting
my father copied from a card

of a ship bucking the waves
at full sail.

My Uncle Mickey

sits as his compact, blue Sears typewriter

asking me questions
about Shakespeare's "The quality of mercy" speech--

one quote on the list Mr. Ripley handed out
on Friday.

"Don't turn in garbage like this again"

was all he wrote on my first
effort.

But my uncle, who
attended Purdue

on the GI Bill before

he was called up for duty in Korea,

takes down my words
thoughtfully

as one piece at a time
its meaning now

shines.

Life Study

squeezed
provocatively
into the half-sheet

of heavy drawing paper,

the feather skirted model
squats
in profile,

done in DeKooning-like colors
with heavy oil crayons.

She's draped with stringed beads
and flamboyantly
pink-nippled.

He did it at the Newark Academy of Art
in the late 40's.

Seeing I'm embarrassed
he jabs it with his

finger and says

"It's good! Ask Mary Jane!"

Night Lights

"Cone 3's down!"--Yuri yells over the roaring gas jets. Then, dead-silence, as he shuts off the valves. Inside, his wife Dolly, my girlfriend, his apprentice, and I put plastic bags over the unfired goblets, with their organic-looking stems, along with the fluted, scalloped-edged bowls, drying on beach-balls sitting in plastic buckets; the leaf-stamped dinner plates; the lidded casseroles, shaped like big puff-balls; and the giant toadstool-like lamp shades with vine-like bases. To keep them from drying too fast and cracking. As we close up shop, I look out the barn-window: the gaps in the fire-brick kiln door glow orange-red like a furnace. On my way out, I empty a bucket of "slip" into a garbage can of clay scraps, that I'll recycle in the old St. Vincent's dough-mixer in the morning. The studio lights go out. Outside, you can hear the pottery as it tinkles and pings. Yuri says he'll "salt" later tonight, when the kiln has cooled down. I help him shift around the two 100 lb. bags of rock-salt sagging against the barn-doors. The exposed, unglazed clay-body will speckle like pretzel skin in the process. The four of us walk down the pitch-black gravel driveway, talking about how it's like

waiting for Christmas
morning to unbrick the kiln.
Suddenly, Yuri points at the
colored lights, dancing
over the black-berry field
rising on the right. A
statically charged
tapestry, hanging in the
sky, north of Delmont. The
glittering draperies of
aurora borealis, like
fluttering ribbons, flashing
rhythmically. As the kiln
cools, like excited, silent
fallout from our thoughts.

News Reel

In a power glide
 down
 to a hundred feet,
 with a news-team there for the ride,
 we broke through the
 stadium-like
 cloud-cover
 (typical monsoon weather),
 all nose and packet guns
 and cannons
 blasting,
 including my 75 mm
 chattering in the
 tail turret,
 as we attacked, amidst the puffs of ack ack,
 a heavily protected
 Japanese power-plant
 in the Mu River valley
 near Schebo.
 And when the pilot fired the rockets,
 new to us,
 two under each wing--
 for an instant it felt as if the plane
 stopped
 but we took no direct hits.
 Still the Movietone man--
 shit in his pants --
 and swore off flying.
 The film we were told
 was shown
 in theatres

The film we were told
was shown
in theatres

back home.

Country Sleep

The summer after I graduated from St. Vincent's I rented part of a farmhouse down the road from the Roshrenca's, to be near Mary Jane, who lived in Irwin. Seven days a week, I walked down the country road, bordered with cornflowers and wild orange poppies, and then headed cross-country to their hillside barn studio to roll out clay plates and bowls for crafts fairs and Pittsburgh art galleries. I was paid piece-meal. It was the best job I ever had. One Sunday night I woke up from having witnessed sleep: no dream, just crystal clear awareness itself, and the most wonderful thought-free, fully ripe silence. It was as if I had never been out. But I felt my foot shaking me awake, and saw that it was 1 o'clock (I always left a light on). And I lay there wondering, as I heard the rushing stream across the road with its foothigh falls at the bend.

Star Ledger

Frank Peluscio, from Roselle?
It must be him. I "googled"
the *Star Ledger* on a whim,
and saw his name in an article
on school pictures. He related
how he begged his parents to
have his braces taken out
temporarily for the yearbook
photo--which turned out badly
anyway and had to be redone.
It's something I can remember
firsthand. He's spokesman now
for the Jersey school boards.
Back then, when my mother and
I returned my senior year,
without a friend in the world,
I rang him up, and he asked
"Have you called anyone else?"
But he always was good company.
He had a car, but never tore
off with the other seniors to
Staten Island for a liquid lunch,
and I lived for our noon-hour
talks about all things 60s. I
recall asking him about something
that happened there during
our days at R.C. High School,
later when he was majoring
at Seton Hall in "Sosh." The
well-liked Mr. Harrow picked
on harmless Ricky Lasure, out
of the blue, asking if that
was "scar-tissue" he had on
his head, to peels of mean
laughter. I avoided getting
a lift from him at the public
bus stop afterward. Frank explained
matter-of-factly that it was
displacement, because the class
was ganging up on *him* over a
bad algebra test. Anyway,
he never gave up on me, though

he shook his head knowingly when I started meditation, and said it was always something new when he saw me. He even happily drove my sister out on the Pennsylvania Turnpike to see me and Mary Jane, whom he liked. I lost track of him some twenty-five years ago, after our marriage. I sent him a card once, to tell him my news, but never heard back.

Bear Mountain

While my mother and Nancy fought the bus crowds at the vending machines, I walked with my dad out to the ski jump that stuck to the hillside like the spines of an old ship. As he smoked, his back turned, I ascended the wooden stairs, narrowing like vertebrae curving right up the steep incline. Step by step I rose, wondering about land-slides--the space growing around me; the sounds from below all gone. After reaching the launching platform, I started to climb even higher, into the trees crowning Bear Mountain. But the grotto-like rocks, closer to the top, made me think, blinking, of sightings of Our Blessed Lady. And I turned around, losing my nerve, and climbed quickly down.

Gallery

Her name--same spelling but without the hyphenated "Wentworth" anymore, in the Omaha World Herald. My wife saw it--and on her suggestion (for closure) I called the gallery, and got her number. I was still surprised it was her. She spent an hour filling me in, about managing the Pittsburgh Arts and Crafts Center, which got to be too much; and then of breaking with Yuri (smashing the unfired casseroles she'd made waiting for his signature to be scratched in); and threatening a lawsuit against the telemarketing firm in California, where a supervisor spilled hot coffee on her white suit over an office dispute; and now designing neon signs for an Italian family business. Her second husband, she said, was spotted by a mutual friend on 42nd street in yellow pumps and make-up. She has two girls, by her third husband, a Black vet, who chased her down the highway after work with a 45 on the seat. She's dating a photographer with a weight problem. The next time I called, she brushed me off, in a minute, because a gallery owner, visiting at her apartment, was slipping out.

Windfall

Sister Aquinas handed
my bony-framed father a
scribbled note, telling
him to take it along to
Visniesski's after school.
There the baker's wife
gave him two jumbo-sized
paper-bags piled high
with jelly donuts, cream
puffs, cupcakes, cookies,
pastries, and rolls--
he couldn't believe his
luck, and though she told
him to "go straight home,"
he snuck around the corner
and passed some out to his
buddies from the bottomless
sacks, like Diamond Jim.
When he came to the kitchen-
door, Grandma grabbed his
arm, thinking he'd stolen
them, and insisted, "Take
them back!"; but he said
"No Mom, no" and told her
what happened, and she went
silently into the parlor,
closed the door, and sat
on the steamer trunk,
crying.

Working Day

I park along a side-street
Beneath a spreading tree
As rain starts beating harder

but I keep the engine running
as the FM station plays
Tchaikovsky's "Meditations"

The robins rest on branches
As I listen to the rain
Reclaiming nature briefly
On a working day

Liberty

the star-crowned
 Queen
 floating
 in and out
 of the seafog,
 staring
sternly yet serene.

I saw her--as we sped
 in my family's silver-
 finned '57 Ford

 in and out of
 Bayonne--

from around the
 twists and turns
 of ramps
 and roads,

through arched bridges

 and out beyond
 silent beaches,

 in variable
 weather

upon smooth or rough seas

as if she was on the move,
 though standing

 seemingly

 upon the waves.

A speechless wonder,
without a name,
stretching forward

in the bay

as the fireboats shot fountains

into the air.

And her eyes,

always
glinting,

looked up

and

away

in the larger-than-life
water pageant
or play.

Down Time

In Garwood, the closet-like bathroom was adorned with flamingo-pink shower curtains and slick jet-colored wallpaper with enigmatic black swans swimming at intervals up and down the wall. Silver lines defined their backward shapes on the lagoon-like, hanging water. Surprisingly, I saw them moving, in a live-action dream, like cartoon characters --elegant necks bobbing in rapid motion, a hundred frames a second. Around them, the waterflowers blew wildly, like lilies in a vertical field. But the swans never budged an inch from their places, their reedy stations, suspended in two-dimensional space. Pink and black, fantasia-like, they glided wildly in the everglades of my mind.

Museum Piece^s

The light bounces obliquely off the plate-glass
 malt-shop
 window,

ricocheting in a tangle of
 silver reflections.

Waiting for the parade,
 a bulky middle-aged soda-jerk
 in a white peaked cap
 and apron

stands beside a seated boy
 in a polo shirt

untwirling
 a handkerchief sized flag
 at the counter.

But suddenly, pointing his finger,
 my father is
 superimposed

on the photograph

and, hardly believing
 his eyes, says
 from behind me,

"It's my old school, where I studied
 on the GI Bill!"

and I see the lettering

in a 2nd story window
 mirrored

^sA Lee Friedlander silver gelatin print in "Robert Frank in Context,"
 an exhibit at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts.

from the opposite
side of the street:

Newark Academy of the Arts!

Class Project

Frankie Brown

and I

headed to the town border

on a school holiday.

He was probably the brightest kid

in our class at St. Anne's,

and recited the Gettysburg Address

from memory

with black beard and stove-pipe hat

up on the auditorium stage.

Batty Sister Symphronia

had assigned a group project,

and our task was to make

a hardscape map

of New Jersey

and so we walked over by the tracks--

which divided Garwood

into north and south-

to Cranwood Lumber

to purchase some

some board and plaster.

They sent us out back to an office

in the yard
where a guy in a carpenter's cap
sat behind
a big work desk
piled with invoices;
but his wall was papered over
with super-slick photographs
from girlie magazines--
dozens of naked
made-up grown women
hanging
like wild tree dwellers
in a jungle
stretching
from floor to ceiling,
posing provocatively
with legs shockingly parted,
hidden folds
of pink skin
exposed
within tangled bushes of hair
for all the world
to see.
They were draped

with strings of beads
and wore rings
and things.
But Frankie and I just glanced
nervously
at each other
and I blurted out
something
and as the man gawped
we got out of there
into the fresh air
feeling ashamed--
just minutes
from my house
on Willow Avenue.

it didn't show

it didn't show
so who could know

you went everywhere
free of care

too far above
to ever love

and when you wed
your cousin they said

the usual things
about what privilege brings

I never knew
what happened to you

but just by chance
I caught your glance

that Christmas eve
as I saw you leave

and our eyes stuck like glue
and I suddenly knew

"Skyway"

the cable cars
hung
like colored Chinese lanterns
strung out
above the expo park

lined with pavilions
from the old and new world:
a golden pagoda,
a geranium decked Swiss chalet,
a larger-than-lie tee-pee,
among corporate showcases
like
the RCA,
Johnson Wax,
and splashy Ford buildings.

All far below us

as we sat suspended midway
over the temporary utopian display
in our gondola
due to a power loss,

waiting for something
to happen.

Not thinking
it was such a great idea now,
I clutched the rim
white knuckled
as Nancy rocked
mischievously
back and forth--
and my Dad chuckled.

Jeannie

In the palm of his hand,
the voluptuous
outstretched
figure curved.

It was only the negative:

her platinum
blonde hair
and body-tones

still strangely alluring in reverse.

Monroe helped him when

he needed money

With nothing on "but the radio!"

Now, she lay there
as if sealed in
the piece of acetate.

(They wouldn't let them show
the print though
on network TV.)

<<Don't tell Mom>>

my sister whispered,
though she was back in Jersey
in her suburban cottage
screened by rhododendrons
and tall fern and day lilies.

And I thought of her
there diligently
cutting and saving coupons
in rubber bands

as Nancy stuck out her hand,
and showed me how she spent
her bonus from Xerox this year:

a golden \$5,000

Rolex

.

5th Grade

<<Where are the visionaries?>>

Sr. Symphronia asked, with a
judicial air.

Three of my schoolmates, in their St. Anne's
jumpers,

with the gold SAS emblems,

walked confidently
up to the front of the class.

They'd seen, we learned,

the statue of Mary

blink

three times

during a lunch hour
rosary.

But as our wonder grew,

and images

of TV crews

and papal visits,

filled our heads,

the old Bernadine, who with a flare

for the dramatic

told us eye-popping
saints' stories

that often ran
to over an hour,

just looked down

and said

"take your seats"

as in disbelief

we stared.

Sandy Hook

Twenty miles out
 from Sandy Hook
 and clouds blew in.
 They checked my life-jacket
 as the seawater sprang up wildly,
 and we headed back.

No catch
 for all our trouble,
 just a blowfish
 puffing
 on the boat-bottom,
 and the fingernail-sized
 porcelain crabs
 and seahorses
 that came up tangled helplessly
 in the soggy kelp
 on my fishing line.

Dad looked rough,
 his eyes-fixed on the shore,
 taciturn.

My uncle ran the outboard as
 the boat bounced and bucked hard,
 not seeming to go anywhere.

. . .

I didn't know how worked up
 they were
 until Uncle Mickey

ran it

full throttle
up onto the beach

two miles south of Mary Jo's boat rental
and bait shop,

getting sand in the motor.

There was a phone booth
up on the road

that we called from,
and a teenager rode out
on his English racer.

We pushed the curved boat
out
into
the water again

and then the boy yanked the cord,
almost pulling the engine
into the air, not
stopping till

it cranked over.

We walked his bike back briskly,

with no talk of risk,

within earshot of

the rushing

surf.

Carol

I sent her a card
some years ago
but whether she got it
I don't know

Her name always
makes me think of bells
and carolers singing
their noels

The last time I saw her
it came as a surprise
I wonder whether
she even realized

I was afraid
to take a chance
and blamed it all
on circumstance

I couldn't believe it
after all
when out of the blue
I got her call

she said let's get together
some time soon
and suggested next Sunday
afternoon

I wondered when I got there
and looked around the house
whether she intended
to introduce her spouse

Not that I had heard
that she had wed
I just assumed
she had instead

she hadn't really changed
that much at all
she'd always been so
lady-like and tall

she looked like an arkangel
without wings
we caught up on a hundred
different things

then she disappeared for a moment
and returned with a surprise
a 3 month old baby
it had her hair and eyes

I wanted to ask her now at last
in spite of everything that's passed

she smiled and said
it meant so much
that after all this time
we'd been in touch

Collateral

Now and again I'd go in to the city with Frank, some hard-earned money from Mom in my pocket, which she happily gave me. (She always remembered those daytrips to Radio City during the war when she was a quality inspector of military shirts at Maidenform in Bayonne, having been thrown out at sixteen by Aunt Mary to make it on her own.) Our usual stops were Doubleday's and Brentano's on Fifth Avenue, St. Patrick's Cathedral, and the Metropolitan and Guggenheim museums. Sometimes we'd get tickets for a recital. One night, when I was home from college, we missed the last train back to Jersey, after a Ravi Shankar concert at Carnegie Hall where, hanging in the bright space of fifth tier balcony seats, we lost track of time. (That night, he and his famous tabla player shared the stage with their sons). We ran from Grand Central Station--gripping our useless return tickets--to the Port Authority, but found out the next bus wouldn't be leaving till 6 a.m. Worse still, the police kept roping off more and more of the building, until we were penned, tired and upset, against the front entrance, where a kind cop also from Jersey told us, "Fellows, you'll have to go." Frank said, "But Officer, we're stranded!" as a heavily made-up black whore in lurid

lavender and yellow-striped capris was hustled out by two of New York's finest. Anyway, he said "Go find a bar on 42 Street and stay out of trouble," but we walked into a growly free-lancing taxi driver just outside the revolving doors instead. He took us all the way to Elizabeth station, where Frank's car was parked. Driving there, the cabby nearly got into a fight over the fare with a third guy, who sat in front, and wanted to be dropped off at the Hoboken docks, which looked like a scene right out of "On the Waterfront." As it was, I ended up as collateral while we followed Frank's dented car back to his parents' house in Roselle to get his share of the \$20 we each agreed to pay. It was 4:30 a.m. when I got in exhausted. But my mother didn't say a thing. It was the day after Thanksgiving in 1970.

Live Model

I overheard some students in the class laughing over how for \$5 on Wednesday nights you could turn up with a sketchpad or camera and use the "life model" supplied by the art school. And I realized they meant Mary Jane, who posed in the nude for art classes like the guy she now shared an apartment with-- a troll-like dude who made formless unglazed ceramic sculptures. And I remembered the negatives in an old black and orange kodak box-- the nude silver images that I printed and left on the photo club's drying machine in the dark-room in the basement of Aurelius Hall, and that two guys found before I returned.

Spare Time

The nose-tingling smell of mold, rising up the basement stairs, triggers the instant-recall of that Saturday: ducking his head, my Uncle Johnny led the way down into the cave-like, mildewed cellar. It housed his locksmith shop, where shining silver and gold blanks hung, all around, on hooks from pegboard. Stacked high on the floor, crates of pop-bottles he got at work, filled with lime, cherry, rootbeer and orange soda, sat collecting dust; his baggy, striped Coca-Cola uniform was slung to the side on an old coatrack. Nailed to the wall was a framed blow-up of his crack B-29 outfit, grouped below a topless blonde-bombshell, painted on the silver fuselage along with the name, "Pappy's Pullman." In the corner of my eye, as he pulled some cardboard from a roughly cut window-hole, I saw a magical light coming from the tightly lidded, blue-green tinted ball jars in an adjacent, earthen-floored room. Brimful, they occupied the tilting shelves, their luminous contents of fruits, berries and pickled vegetables, submerged in colored fluid, like relics. But then, my uncle, tickled pink, squeezed through the narrow opening. We followed, in silence, and, standing in the chilly blackness, were

suddenly dazzled by a welter of steel and glass reflections(as he flicked on the caged-light suspended from a rafter) that filled the steeply pitched barn-like garage, bouncing helter-skelter off of the gleaming chrome and polished body of his half-restored, gold 1937 Cord.

Ed Engel

Ed Engel
blew in
to South Dakota
to see his
niece Katie
get her degree

I met him
at the party
he threw
in her honor

he was seated
at the banquet table
just opposite
from me

it turned out
that he's from
my part of Jersey
and is friends
with the family
of someone that I knew

he told me
how he stayed
with her
in Maui
where she owned
a surfboard shop
for something to do

I remembered how
I'd heard she had
a kidney problem
some years ago
and I wonder
if that's why
she moved away

Since then
she married
and lives
just outside

of Boston

where her
husband runs
a Marriot hotel

she has five kids
the same as
her own mother)
"she's a real beauty"
he added then
as well

he just talked
to her
on the telephone
the other day
as he often does
and I hoped
next time he'd
mention
who I was

Dad's War

Always hungry my Dad, flying
in the 37th Bomb Squadron

at an airbase
in Chinkung
or Luichow, China,**

signed up for a boxing match
because he'd get
more food
that way.

But that day he got
"the heck" knocked out of him
in the ring.

And blinded by blows,
his nose broken
(for the second time),

he spat out the liquid
they poured
down his guzzle,

wetting and upsetting

the honored guest
Madame Chiang Kai-shek,
who sat in the first row--

Which he didn't really regret,
having seen
the gutted plane

loaded with lipsticks
and stockings.††

** Flying B-24s in the 374th Bomb Squadron Heavy 81st Heavy Bomb Group in Chinkung. Kunming or Luichow, China.

†† He said that out of every seven Chinese soldiers, one had a rifle, the others just sticks. they joined up because they were promised a bowl of rice a day. "No one suffers like the Chinese," he added.

Chance

Audubon's double-elephant folio, that bespeaks his "passion for scale." His birds strike wild attitudes--the crook-necked snakebird or *anhinga* sunning its pre-historic wings ecstatically; the flaming-red flamingo stretching giraffe-like to drink; and, in the Florida Keys, the frilled white-heron, with jointed-steps, tilting its head upward to flick the silver catch into its bill. On TV I saw six remaining original copper-plates being reamed and polished, at Alecto's in London, for the final inking, from gaudy color-charts. "Stop-action chromatic displays." But eradicated: #26 his scintillating red, yellow and green carolina paroquet; #62 the passenger pigeon, that once blotted out the sun; and #66 the bark-splitting, ivory-billed woodpecker, with its hair-like shock of red-feathers (its bird calls and rapping lately captured on audio?). But they live on here, along with the other species, that bend and curl, squeezing into the picture-frame.

Grandma Emily
("Milka")

The tinkling balalaika sounds of the Dr. Zhivago theme play on the kitchen radio. Its waltz-like spell hangs in the air as my aunt Josie recalls things grandma told her about St. Petersburg, where she was raised by two Polish uncles, a physician and a pharmacist (she thinks their name was "Glodz"). They worked for Czar Nicholas, and wouldn't take her until she learned to walk with books on her head and to exchange pleasantries in Russian. (She had picked up the shuffling gait and other habits of the peasants on her father's farm back in Poland). She had fond memories of the sparkling social life at court: nightlong balls at the Winter Palace; snow queens in ermine capes; moon-white, pumpkin-shaped carriages; twinkling lights on the Neva. She attended the conservatory or palace school, where she spoke to her best friend in her native French. (She knew five languages in all). They intended for her to become a court seamstress, but in 1912 she was sent to relatives in Kearney, using her older sister Alice's passport. They wrote letters that went straight to her heart. She took them out just to hold them sometimes. But they didn't survive.

Meditating

for a "health spot"
on KSFY-TV's
late-night news show .

The sweat-shirted one-man crew tapes us
sitting,
eyes closed,

from several positions:

straight on,
in profile,
and from the lobby balcony,

collapsing
and relocating

the heavy metal tripod
of his videocam

that looks like the landing gear on a space probe
for each new shot.

He and Alexis Kraus, the anchor who interviewed us, leave
discreetly, as we

finish. . . .

That week Dr. Mendinger and Sue
at <<Sir Hair Stylists>>

surprised me by saying they saw the report
on Keloland TV,

obviously tickled
by the whole thing .

But what I remember is transcending--

free of any boundaries
as a breeze .

Sitting Pretty

"Sitting Pretty"

--a scantily clothed, overly made-up

blonde bombshell

at her make-up table.

But the website photo's mislabeled.

There's my Uncle Johnny and his crew,

members of the 421st Bomber Squadron,

comprising

fifteen B29s,

posing

bare-chested, smoking

in two rows, one

standing behind those
seated.

The pilots sporting valiant Errol Flynn-
 like
 moustaches.

But his plane was named

"Pappy's Pullman."

I found it at
"B29 Noseart.com"

while "ego-surfing" for Balakier.

He was their ground chief,

in the 509th Air Command,

and said

all these years

they disappeared,

on a bombing raid
to Kagamigahara,

into a cloud

under attack
by four zeros.

That was on June 21st, 1945.

It would have been
their final mission.

But I read here

how they survived

only to be
beheaded

in turn.

My Dad sent him the news,
I learned,

against

my better judgment.

Why

Uncle M. turned up for once on a weekday evening as I was watching *Star Trek* reruns in our new house, a cape cod cottage with evergreens and flowering shrubs screening the windows and doors. He told me my parents had split up --that Dad wasn't moving back from western Pennsylvania, after all, like the rest of us. My sister couldn't wait, in fact, and spent the summer with him down the shore in Hazlet, and made a boyfriend who ran a boardwalk stall at Seaside Heights. (Later that fall they ran off to Columbia; the police met her at the Jersey state-line to bring her home, when she was reported missing.) Mom had taken Nancy this night to a Donovan concert at Seton Hall, and waited the entire time in the parked car. Any how, I don't know if he made a specific trip to tell me this, or how true it even was. But he left right afterward, as Mr. Spock archly raised an eyebrow, and I sat there, unglued at the idea.

Mary Elizabeth

Mary Elizabeth? September 26, 1956. My mother mentioned it, after all these years. A family memory. They took her, in good spirits, in the ambulance gurney--her hair wrapped in a terry-cloth towel like a turban--avoiding the front step, carrying her around it on the sloping lawn. They turned on the siren, for fun, on the way. Dad and Uncle Mickey took care of Nancy and me, burning the fish on Friday to a crisp, and then telling us it's cooked that way. And I believed it, in our old kitchen with the vinyl wall-paper decorated with an Italian chef pattern. They took us to pick up Mom at Mullenburg; they wanted us to be there but there was no new sister. My mother, kind of sad, was wheeled out, in her Sunday best, and we went home. She's surprised how much I remember, more than her.

Round Trip

My dad's tentmate
in the Himalayas
and Burma--
Jimmy (like me) Nara-- got the idea from a bulletin

board
for them to volunteer

for duty in the jungles
down south,
where they
were flying

"clerks, cooks, and bakers."

They'd got tired of flying the "Hump"
in B-24's
refitted for hauling fuel
to China
(the round trip
took
as much gas as they carried).

Besides, one time they saw
another plane explode

over the mountains
from a spark.

• • • •

Sometimes they were assigned to the same plane:

Dad flew tail, Jimmy flew radio.

But he was scared of hanging out
 out of the
 bottom hatch

to photograph a bridge
they'd attacked,

so Dad did it instead.

No one on the crew ever knew.

Then on a bridge-busting mission
to Gokteik

his plane, #3, for some reason

went out of turn

and at low level was over the
target when #1's bomb,

with a delayed fuse,
blew
in the river.

He saw the B-25 flip over
and crash.

Years later, at a reunion a guy
who was liberated
from a prison by the Brits

told him that Jimmy miraculously survived

but died there
of his untreated wounds.

A doubly sorry boon.

Mask

My clay face-mask.
Stone-fired and salted
to a reddish chocolate brown.

It's been sitting
on the bottom
of my Mom's dining table cart,
unobtrusively,
for years,
like some family artifact,
with plastic flowers.

I laid on a work table
in the ceramics lab
at Seton Hill
while Roger Dilbert,
the instructor,
and Mary Jane

put two straws
in my nostrils
and laid the wet plaster
on my head,
like icing a cake.

It got surprisingly warm
by degrees,
as it hardened
and dried.

It was the template
into which she pressed
moist, wedged clay
from a barrel.

Lifting it out,
she studied
my impression,

and then touched it up,
here and there, adding
file-sized clay shavings
for beard hairs,
which she brushed
with iron oxide stain.

Except for 20% shrinkage,
it's a good likeness.

I resemble a Russian, or
Byzantine priest,
meditating,
with my high slavic forehead
and cheeks,
and projecting eyebrows

(but the lips, my wife told me
when I met her,
are sensuous).

No telltale acne scars
as in real life,
on the bridge of my nose,
which is somewhat bubble-shaped,
like the Gaydos's, but
straight and true
in profile.

It made me feel
like Joyce or Sterne,
whose visages I'd seen,
preserved in metal
or plasticene;
comical, serene.

I joked about it,
prompting a non-trad,
an older lady
I hadn't noticed before,
to remark
that it was a "nice face."

It sits now, in any case,
like the carapace
of the antediluvian
horseshoe crabs
we'd find dotting
The sunny Jersey shore.

Swimming Hole

I wrote pool, but it looks
like s-o-u-l. The dream did it,
I know. I stood in a corner of
the northern New Jersey moun-
tains, at the foot of a dark
fishing-hole, walled in by hard-
wood trees. On the side
opposite me, my Uncle Mickey,
clad in baggy plaid swim-trunks,
ran elatedly out onto a
make-shift plank diving-board.
Hollering wildly, he suddenly
jumps, feet-first, holding his
nose--just as if it was our old
canvas Sears pool. The board
thuds, and he drops like lead.
But the water, surprisingly,
Out of proportion to reality.
They stir something deep down
inside me, as they swell mightily
and subside. Then the air settles;
and the tall-limbed trees, which
seem strangely conscious, pose
like ballerinas in the silence
as all-encircling as the diamond
blue sky.

**Deep in the Heart of Jersey
(or Return of the Native)**

The purling brook
It would come out
on the sound track,
since luckily
no cars came by
just then.

It flowed about
8 ft. below
the bridge railings,
between the banks
at the back of
houses.

I remembered
how I wanted
to follow it
all of the way
hopping from stone
to stone.

I was parked there
and decided
to walk around
the corner to
the place where I
grew up.

Among the scrim
on our driveway
my kid-sister's
name still appeared--
"Nancy"--above
the date:

1-9-5-8.
But I could not
make out my own.
Still I pointed
the camera
and shot.

When I got back

I thought it strange
that someone parked
right behind me
and still sat at
the wheel.

And as I tried
to pull away
a big Buick
came alongside
and wouldn't let
me out.

The guy inside
said I'd have to
talk to the cops
and soon enough
a patrol car
pulled up.

And some old men
came out onto
their lawns and looked,
all eyes and ears,
while I explained
myself.

The officer
with a cell phone
in his right hand,
a radio
in his left, ran
a check

on my out-of-
state plates and my
driver's license.
Between calls he
told me Garwood
had changed.

He was my age
and said there'd been
scams in the old
neighborhood. A
second police
cruiser

came down the street
and I was sure
they'd be taking me
to the station
for questioning,
at least.

But as if on
a whim, smiling
he said "Oh GO
ahead . . ." and I
got in my car
and left.

Across the street
a woman yelled
"Hey help me find
my dog" and things
all got back to
normal.

Overdue

a letter came the other day
I didn't recognize the name
and put it on the side somewhere
and forgot about it lying there

it's busy now with summer's end
I'll have to set the clocks again
and soon the leaves will tumble down
by the thousands to the ground

I remember now your name has changed
but it still seems very strange

I can't say now I understand
why it meant so much on the other hand
it gave me a reason to complain
on days when all it did was rain

that people get on with their lives
doesn't come as any big surprise
and even if she didn't write
that doesn't mean it wasn't right

but to wait till now to make a move
there's not a lot to prove

even so I think I'll wait
to open it at some later date
when everything has settled down
like snow upon the winter ground

or maybe I'll just let it sit
and sometimes think of it

Rings and Strings

A row of rings

with hanging strings ran

across the top
of Uncle Johnny's
cabinet.

My Dad (six years his junior) would hide
and watch from behind

as he moved several of them
and tugged
on the strings,

like opening the tumblers on a safe.

(He was a locksmith and safe expert later on)

My Dad tried to memorize the combination,

but it never worked.

Finally, years afterward, he asked him

how it opened,

and he showed him

the hidden latch below.

Salvage

Like a huge lacquered
black box

my parents' old double-dresser

waits at the curb--

mulberry purplish from last night's rain.

It's older than me--acquired
brand-new
in the 40s.

The contoured drawers
on either side are bowed elegantly,
like sea-gull wings.

John and Paul, the retired handymen,
who moved it out there, took
the triple set of middle compartments
for tools and things.

It's been a permanent fixture
in my Garwood memories, especially

that time Nancy and I
burst in on my mother,
kneeling

at the foot of the child-sized,
open-armed
Black Madonna

that stood in the cosmetics tray

miraculously multiplied
at an angle
before the 58" wide mirror.

Draped in strands of beads; her cape and crown
spangled with cut-glass
gemstones.

It circulated within

the St. Anne's

Rosary

Society

.

History Channel

Just as my Dad
was telling

his buddies
to watch the History Channel
that night,

a B25 Mitchell roared by on the
Clearwater VFW TV,
in an ad for the film

Steven Spielberg sent his crew
to do, including
an Academy Award winning director,
of the 490th's reunion
in Salt Lake City last year.

His own father Arnold was in Communications,

and my Dad
remembers
how he'd

disappear into his khaki tent

all day sometimes

and "you'd hear classical music playing."

They followed them around

"from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.,"

and though my Dad's interviews were

edited out

of this version, Arnold told him
(whom he introduced to his son once
as "the builder")

it would be out on DVD
before long.

But they left in
the footage of
the bus ride up to the
air museum
filled with mountain light,
showing him (in jeans and white athletic shoes)
entering with some other vets
and taking a turn, smiling, around the restored
two-engine bomber,
looking like a blow up
above head-height

of my

Hasbro model

.

Errand
(For J.B.)

I remember it
because Grandma had
never asked us
for anything before
but she wanted
Dad to drive her
somewhere
and so that sunny June
she pointed the way
up out of Edwardsville
into the heavily treed mountains
bounding Wyoming Valley,
until she had him stop
at some altitude
at an overgrown glen
and got out
in her flowered house-dress
and Cuban heels
and looked tentatively
till she took off
like a shot
for an inconspicuous spot

with a white card-holder
none of us had seen
and she got
down on her knees
and pulled grassblades
from around it
and cleared
the immediate area
of leaves
and stood in front
of it for a moment
in the dappled daylight
and then we left
without much
word about it.
Two weeks later
we got that call--
It was Aunt Josie
Saying she'd died.

After All

The leaves are gone
they've blown away
I watched the colors
fly all day

But even if everything's changed
it still feels the same
when I think of you

The days are getting
shorter now
I wonder whether
still somehow

I'll be able to see you again
and if you'll remember when
you saw me last

I used to always
watch the news
but it's just a game
of win and lose

now I keep the TV set tuned
to the weather channel
night and noon

But sometimes
I wish I could make up for what
I somehow lost

I dream about you
off and on
first you're there
and then you're gone

but though you disappear
it feels like summer's still here
after all

Emails

My sister Nancy says she's
"as big as a Toyota" now.
She emailed me the sonogram
of her twins from Palo Alto
--floating, gelatinous figures,
in the rippling printout. The
doctor said there's better than
a 50% chance that they're iden-
tical, since they're attached
in the womb, next to each
other of all places, which
is more likely with a split
egg-sac. It happened after
she left her management job
at Xerox for 20 years. And I
think back to Andrew's Street--
the swinging double garage doors;
and just steps away, the
sparkling open-water around
Bayonne. The box-like rooms there
had flowered wallpaper. My Dad
loved to tease, "You'll wake
the twins!" when we fought.
They lived below us, and once
I saw them through the open-door,
sleeping while their mother
ironed in the sunlight. Anyway,
he forwarded a message the
other day from his cousin Agnes
in Sayresville, about how it runs
in the Balakiers: her daughter
had twin boys, and her sister
Jo's daughter too, not to
mention Grandpa Emil's sister.
But there's my mom Helen, who
always wanted a big family like
she never had, and was put with
Uncle Mickey in a foster home
when their folks died(until the
families at St. Joseph's got

on Aunt Mary's case). She tells me when she was carrying me, Dr. Pijanski looked up at her silently--pressing his head on her middle--and held up two fingers, for two new hearts.

(Julietta)

My island Paradise in the week:
the Thursday matinee at the Athens
Cinema. Done teaching, I occupy
a ringside seat below the sail-
like screen that breaths in the
theater air-currents. Watching
intently Gulietta Masina's
dream: she's an angel-haired
school-child again, being con-
sumed by flickering paper-flames,
in a saint's play. And then,
distressingly, she gets stuck
by accident in the wooden box,
as the nuns flap and flutter
all around it on stage. And I
wonder how my mom is. Uncle
Henry, my father's brother
in Sugar Notch, who dated
her first, said my grand-
mother Maria didn't die.
Later I dialed information
for the number of the Lehigh
Valley Pastoral Institute,
but after all couldn't call.
I thought of the three of them,
before a faux-landscape in
a studio-portrait, with a
garden curtain and potted
plants, highlights in their
hair, dressed all in white.
She was five then, older
than either Mickey or Frankie.
I learned then from Aunt Josie
and Uncle Johnnie how she
and my father, before they
married, drove all over the
Bethlehem and Allentown area
looking for Frank, the "baby,"
who was adopted by the Estoch
side of the family--while they
remained Gaydos's, and were
raised during hard-times in
Bayonne. . . But on waking,
Fellini's waif-like actress-wife,
with auburn hair like my mother's,

no longer harried, glides outside
her house, from left to right, in
the clear morning light, over to
the blowing umbrella of Italian
cypresses adjoining their lot--after
twenty-five years, finally free.

Liberty Coin

Uncle Mickey's 1897
gold \$5 Liberty coin
proof 64
he bought it
with dollar signs
in his eyes for \$21,700
thinking he would make a killing
("it had been up to \$45,000
in the 80s")
it's down to about \$14,000 now
and he keeps it buried
with his other rare coins
in the earthen floor
in the trellised space
off the basement
of his raised Pocono cabin
(2,000 ft.
above sea level
"why the cats
don't get flees")
where the old porch used to be
and he keeps his stockpile
of gasoline and kerosene
and cut logs
for his stoves
"If I croak, it's all yours
and Nancy's" he said.

Clearwater

The painting, in its golden wood-frame, slid over the videotapes on which it was resting, out of the TV cabinet and onto the carpet. He'd asked about it for years. It was a wedding gift in 1948 from Frederick W. Reisman himself, who'd had an exhibition at the White House. The frame alone cost \$65 back then. My father knew him, I suppose, through his friends at the Newark Academy of Art. My mom said it was OK for him to have it, and I took it down from above her chair, and shipped it through Mail Boxes Etc., not knowing how much to insure it for. A rough-surfaced Pocono landscape with copper tinted mountains and bronze-colored snow, through which a cobalt stream flows out into the room. He said, embarrassed, he meant to get it cleaned.

BEST LIGHT

Collage

Ann's cubicle is wall-papered like a thrift-store
Sistine Chapel

with exhibition posters and
postcards, book jackets and
student art

that seem to tumble out in a jumble
into the office white-space.

It all unfolds
like an accordion
or an oriental fan

from the center
of which
look

a stringed mask of Mona Lisa

and the massive head
of a Thracian King
with stone curls,

while to either side

a plethora of replicated
shape-shifting figures
swirl
up and outward--

like a blue Matisse nude
squeezing next
to a chrome-yellow file cabinet;

to which is taped

a carved wooden Lakota

horse springing
into action,

a zebra by Constable that poses
shyly sideways
in a studio jungle;

a flowered
Mary Cassatt lady

wedged
in a tight corner,

sealing a folded letter.

Not to mention

a fluted puzzle-like
Brazilian feather basket
wild with color,

a Palladian dome

and archways
open to infinity,

the Brooklyn Bridge
straining like a silver-net
or web
on the sky

and a Chinese master's
white and red
poppies
hanging on

a vertical gold-field;

a brilliant azure page

from Trés riche heures;

and an elegant man whose head is

out of frame

with his long-fingered hand
touching
the prized first American geranium.

It's all there
360 degrees
spilling like waves

and filling the square room
with the colors and forms

of centuries of cultures'
rise and fall.

Gift Watch

the
17 jewel

Unichron
wrist-watch

I've had for twenty-five years,

with the moveable ring
for telling

how much air is left
while submerged--

its Giotto-blue face
encased

in a new crystal;

like some navigational
star

I've checked thousands of times
tranquilly
diving

in

meditation

.

Amélie

it's 12:08
people are moving
the sun is out
an accordion's playing
on the boulevard

in a candy shop
a hunk of pink taffy
is pulled and plopped
like wads of bazooka
on a thingamajig

a parade of one
and happy to be so
chère Amélie
catches the breeze
like a soft perfume

and thinks about
Mother Teresa
and silently
revels in something
she did unasked

and no one knows
what she's been doing
or where she's from
as the light of the day
opens in her mind

and everything
is full of fresh wonder
as here and now
she crosses the bridge
on the River Seine

and light as air
with a special intention
she ascends the stairs
up into the sun
shining on Mountmarte

and she negotiates
the colorful easel
taking in the lives

of others in seconds
and she negotiates
the colorful easel
taking in the lives
of others in seconds
by Sacré Coeur

Ben Barber

For sale,
an heirloom photograph
of my father-in-law
in his overalls, hauling milk in
a wide-mouthed dairy can
that he pours out
like a mythological
giver of nature's
goods.

At his daily round
in the forties
wearing his farmer's cap--

the barn light
clean as a whistle.

Matted but unlabeled
it sits on a shelf

in an Illinois country store
owned by
my wife's niece

among other goods:

 painted bird boxes
 ribboned baskets
 and John Deere
 toy tractors.

I walked out-- on principle,
without
saying anything.

And yet I'm upset now
I didn't buy it.

Cirque de Matisse

Releasing
the trapeze

he swings
with ease

through
the
air of possibilities

but the flying
artist
is
out of sight

like
Matisse

who used
sleight of hand

and the pochoir
technique

to transfer
his cut outs
to metal stencils

that were then
painted with vibrant
watercolors
and gouache.

He celebrates
I see

the
like souls
of jugglers
and clowns

swimming-tank
divers
and blind-
or-not

lovers

who gamble all
on their own
inimitable

hidden
power

.

Request: Bob Shipley

<<You have to understand Slovaks
and their family plots>>
Ann's old Canadian friend Robert Shipley
emailed back.

It concerned my "outrageous" inquiry
to photograph
my grandfather
Michael Francis Gaydos's grave
if he was in the neighborhood.

But he and Dana were in Banska Bystrica,
to the west,
where she's living.

Bob noted "They take care of them,
visit every couple of weeks, bring
flowers and light candles."

Now
 how my grandfather died
 is a bit of a mystery:

 he'd succumbed to pneumonia
 while visiting or relocating the
 family there
 in 1931
 after being thrown
 into the local reservoir
 by gypsies
 he told
 to vacate his parents' land
 (they'd moved back there
 from South Amboy where he was born
 And raised).

But my Uncle Mickey
remembers being fished
out of the water there
by a gypsy.

Bob ended, at any rate:

 "They take care of them,
 visit every couple of weeks,
 bring flowers and light candles."

Silken Wonder

The
levitating rock
--a natural wonder--

in Lu Wei's upended silk
painting.

It hangs like a comet
in the air
beside the partly attached
circular boulder
from which a tree rises
with cherry-pink
blossoms
resembling an armload of

forced forsythia
branches.

While the scholar
in his tilted
pavilion on stilts

gazes apparently
unaware .

Shoebox

for an awful moment
I thought I'd lost them
I couldn't find them
anywhere
without an
explanation
they'd vanished
into air

but a little
while later
as I thought
of something else
I recalled where I
had seen them
lying on
a shelf

the envelopes
were postmarked
Seelisberg and
Milkysfruit

and the letters
talked of boat rides
and "splashing
about in the absolute"

I felt the same
elation
at finding them
again
as when I first
received them
in the mail
way back when

As I go about
my business
every now and then
I yearn

at last to take
a boat ride
on crystal
Lake Lucerne

Gesso
(For L.F.)

Brushed with gesso
the unstretched canvas
pulls and puckers
in folds
from surface tension.

But it holds their shapes,
(with the help
of the chalk
and gypsum mixture)
beneath layer upon layer
of applied paints
that bring out
the natural creases
and crinkles comprising
the "ground":

the shimmering texture
resembling
Renaissance gowns
or unmade bed sheets—

and shining
like the silence
behind sound.

House Guest

Bright night
with gold splotches
of spiraling light

painting the wall,
flowing into a sky-like poster
of the same.

Showing my Dad
my room
at 3 a.m.
with all its things—
old bookcases he made,
photos
in frames
on the floor,
and more.

And I remember
on waking
how his young wife
half wistfully said
back in '74

something
about
that hit song
with his name.

August 31, 2015

Light Wear

dipping
the cloth
in the dye

like a
bucketful
of sky

then
hanging
it out
to dry

till
the fabric
turns
new

colorfast
and
true

slipping
into
the light

whether
it's day
or night

coming
out clean
and bright

fresh as
the morning
air

free and
fully
aware

.

A 50's Sunday on the Couch

a few streaks
of graphite

and snow appears
out of
blank space

draping

the upward lifting
tree-branches

as
light-handed
John Nagy's
pencil sweeps

over the TV screen
giving
texture
to the

nothingness

in the spotless
winter scene .

St. Vincent's

I'd meditate
in Aurelius Hall
after classes were done
for the day,
among ink-stained
and scarred desks,
facing the half-erased
blackboard.

And like clockwork,
the security guard,
jangling his keys,
would lock the door
from the outside,

never thinking
anyone was
in there.

But I sat in silence--
as wide as the sky
over the
laurel highlands--

with the sounds
of soccer practice
bouncing

from the sunken
playing field
off into space.

And
I could feel
bubbling up
a bliss beyond
anything
big or small,
come rain or sun,

and no one
knew it at all.

Lost and Found

Rolleiflex
in
hand

Vivian Maier
stands
still as glass
looking down

as strangers
pass

lost and found
in the
best light

dippy socialites
with an air
fresh-faced
black and white kids
on a sea-saw
are there
along with
square-shouldered cops
news-stand beauties
beach lovers
and
hard-guys
in suits

but playing her part
she shoots
first and last

sure-fingered

straight
from
the heart

.

Label Art

In today's mail,
from David Hooper,
the *Purest Ganga Jal*,
sealed at an Uttar Kashi
filling plant
in a plastic pack--
"at a celestial height"
of 8500 ft.

It pours
on the
wrapper
of the
hermetic-pouch
like antediluvian
melted-snow,
"with zero bacteria
and silver in
traces,"

down the ridged Himalayas
(where my technique
for transcending is from)

and out into
the space
at hand .

Lately

it's nice to think
you're up and about
and doing things
like you've always done
as natural
as anyone can be

it comes easily
to someone like you
just like a bird
that's on the wing
as anyone at all
can plainly see

Lately I've
been thinking about
taking all
my books and things
and putting them
in a Salvation Army
box

I've accumulated
quite a lot
especially
in the
last few years

sometimes
it's hard
to know
just when
to stop

the feeling
seems
to be growing
after
all this time

I've got
to make
a change
or two
come rain
or shine

Mining Country Idyll

My Dad was Huck Finn
 leaving through the front door,
 off Myers Street;
 picking apples
 all day
 in the hills
 and returning late
 with a bagful
 in thanks for his help;
 jumping from train trestles
 at the last minute
 as the steam engine
 whistled
 with the other boys
 and scarring Aunt Josie to tears;
 swimming 8 mile long Harvey's lake
 and back and forth
 across the Susquehanna;
 hopping on freight trains
 and being sent home
 by railroad detectives.

He remembers the burning crosses across the valley,
 none of this phased him

 but when his mother
 called "Vill helm!"
 for dinner
 he came running--
 a name the monsignor
 changed to Vincentio
 on his baptismal certificate
 because there was no saint William
 (though he went variously by Garra the boxer,
 (to my mother and his siblings)
 Paul, his middle name, to his mother,
 Johnny to the bridge Busters,
 of which he was the kid,
 and of course Vince
 by everybody else.

Party Hero

One day
each summer
down the Jersey Shore

is what I got

even though
you could tell how close
to the suburbs
the sea was from the balmy air.

But I played the Beach Boys.

And I had a copy
of their songbook

--put out by the Sea of Tunes
Company--

that showed all
their guitar chords
and bass lines.

I took it along
back stage the night
light-years later
I met Mike Love.

Two bull-dog guards
in orange t-shirts
with arms crossed
blocked my buddy and me
from the dressing rooms
at the open-air stadium.

But we were there
on business,
with party supporters
who the beach-ware clad
lead singer
had offered
to glad hand.

I was last,

and all he wanted
to do was get ready
for his concert.

But he autographed
my sheet music for

"The Warmth of the Sun"
anyway.

I was happy
to be out of there,

and haven't even
thought about it

again

till now.

Day after Day

Kit
liked
to sit
with his paws
curled up
in front
of the stereo speaker
on the right

and listen
to Vivaldi
at night
while we ate—

just Vivaldi,
--not Bach or the Beatles--
and he loved it all:
concertos,
sonatas,
sinfonias,
cantatas.

Settling down
on the carpet
facing the music

and closing
his sweet and soulful
cat-eyes,

he
stayed
there
purring
agreeably

without a care
for as long

as it played.

Weather Alert

After
Maharishi's talk
at "Taste of Utopia" in '84

we found ourselves
driving
in pea-soup
fog

through
a tunnel
inexplicably
like a rolling
funhouse
barrel

all the way
to the Chief Wappello motel
on old Rt.34 -

an opening
in a swirling
space/time
continuum
around the car

.

Gold Chit

he gave me the things
he's kept for so long
bagged up in plastic
in the garage

afraid they'd end up
in a yard sale some day
or thrown in the
garbage

his dog tags
and medals
and old foreign
currency

and something he seemed to
prize most of all
that he'd stapled to cardboard
to keep it in shape

it was made out of silk
and frayed on the sides
where it was sewn
to his jacket

but it shimmered
like water
flowing
in low light

it looked like
a pocket-sized flag
with a sun
and characters
laid out in several rows

he explained they said
anyone returning this man
to American lines would be

rewarded with gold coins
in thanks from the allies

I padded his things
in my suitcase with socks
and flew back
the next day
thinking a lot

and when I got home
I laid them all out
on the table and wondered

whether to frame them
or store them in boxes

Whooping Cranes

circling
 on a
 thermal
 4 migrating
 whooping cranes
 coast
 north-east
 at
 tree-height--
 a
 rare
 sight--
 as spell-bound
 I back
 out onto
 the street.

they ride
 the warm
 air current
 horizontally,
 hanging
 in bright space,
 legs dangling,
 whirling
 slowly
 like a
 blowing
 dandelion seed
 in a nature show--
 gliding
 forwards
 soundlessly,
 moving
 with
 motionless
 7.5 ft. wings
 —
 as I follow.

Showcase

In sun-suits Mary Jane
 and her sister Beckie,
 on rented bicycles,
 call up
 to my window.

We're on holiday
 at a seaside or desert resort
 populated
 with pink, blue, green
 and yellow
 bungalows.

The dream-furniture
 of our Cape May
 honeymoon,
 aside
 from
 Beckie.

She's majoring
 in textiles
 at Indiana State
 --two hours from
 her home in Irwin.
 She gave me
 a batik tie
 of an exquisite rose
 on a sky-blue field.

Like her
sister,
she can turn out
first class crafts
from any medium.

I remember Mary Jane
telling me how
they take showers
together,
laughing.

Last time
I saw her was when
they picked up her mail.
It was strange, their going off
without me.

At the O.U. gallery,
by happenstance,
I saw a relief sculpture,
with a bowl-shaped
frame thrown
on a potter's wheel.
The piece was
made of pink
unglazed clay body.
Mary Jane and Beckie's
face-molds
peered out

at the viewer,
their hair covered
with bathing caps—
only room
for one balloon—
like boob
of each of theirs,
hanging out
like a pair
into space

.

Matisse in Pajamas

one by one
on a hotel wall
marked with scuffs
and stains

a reef of shapes
is hung with tape
like a cut-out carnival

by an old pajama'd
man-in-bed
whose blue eyes
sparkle with sky

the pair of scissors
in his hands
goes deftly
flashing by

as he snips away
all night and day
and finds
what's possible

Wilton Diptych

the workaday halos
 in the Wilton diptych

of a bevy of beautiful
 angels,

with lapis lazuli wings,
 crowding around

the standing Virgin with Child

in the right-hand run of the mill
 poplar wood panel--

are punched with plain rings
 forming raised patterns

in the expansive
 gold leaf--

the foil beaten to airy thinness
 from bags of florins.

Elaborately ethereal, no two alike,
 in a masterpiece

described as
 "halfway between painting and jewelry,"^{††}

they call to mind
 Frank Lloyd Wright's

"blossoms of soul"^{§§}--

intricately
 giving off
 light.

^{††}Neil McGregor, Director, National Gallery, London.

^{§§}Frank Lloyd Wright on buddhist fragments he collected at Taliesin, Wisconsin.

Super Strings

Super strings
lift me up

but not
a puppet's dangling
cords:

Subtle wings of thought .

And I think
of standing

effortlessly

on the
tips
of grassblades

or, as Patanjali says,

walking on a spider's
silkweb and

flying, golden
In the sun's
rays .

**Sesqui-Centennial Exhibit
(Woodstock Public Library Summer 2002)**

the four beauties of Woodstock
riding royally
permed and curled
on the Buckley Cleaner's
fringed
crepe-covered
cake like
float
gliding in front of
Koblentz's Department Store
with its awnings unfurled
still shining with smiles
after 50 years
Peggy Slavin,
Mary Ellen Burmeister
Betty Tornow
and unnamed
but in the center
Ann Barber
actually of Greenwood
who completely amazed
tells me how she got out her prom gown

Bumble Bee

Going
about
his business
at Earl Mays
a bumble bee
on Mother's Day
slips
from blossom
to blossom
on a potted
honeysuckle
plant
fumbling
at a slant
as he hums along.

A commercial haven
of a sort--
but free as air
he moves me
there
like a point
that holds
all the care
in the
world.

Somewhere in Heaven

Somewhere in heaven
my mother is there
watching the day
from her TV chair
reading a mystery
and saying a prayer
and not ever having
to go anywhere

Somewhere in heaven
her azaleas still bloom
with the rhododendron
outside her room
and it always looks
like the beginning of June
and she's expecting
that I'll visit her soon

There up in heaven
where the clouds are in flower
and you can't tell the difference
between minutes and the hours
and whenever it rains
it's just a sun shower
she'll never again
have to go without power

Reunion: Bridge Busters

<<He's the only person I know
who doesn't have to
take off his shoes
when he gets on
a plane.>>

One of his war buddies teased Arnold Spielberg,
who flew in via private jet
for the 490th Reunion
in New Orleans.

My Dad knew him in Burma:

he'd hear classical music playing
in his tent
on his days off.

He was a radio specialist.

My father said Stephen
would be there
as well,

though he didn't make
this one after all.

But my sister, Ann and I
talked

to him and Dad
around the table.

He was surprised to hear
"Vince" went to art school,

but "couldn't provide
for a family that way."

When he found out I teach

English like his wife,

he enthusiastically
went over a ranking of Jane Austen's
novels with me.

Afterwards

he said "what sharp people,"

which my father reported,
pleased.

Bird and Flower

The Garwood den--the addition at the back of the house. But the 4th wall, on the north side, is gone. Instead, an eden of branches, thick with sprays of apricot-colored leaves, fills the yard-space. It's as if the borders mom planted are bursting at the seams. Orioles flock like wild, with black throats and crests, and feed on the sweet nectar from the windblown peach-flowers--heads turning. It's blooming over--hiding the circular depression, like a meteor site, where the canvas Sears pool sits; the doll-house like bike-shed my father built; the basketball board and hoop on a free-standing pole. The high-backed red couch, on a rush-mat covered floor, faces forward. Toward the sweeping, new growth. Quince or soft dawn-yellow.

Late and Soon

Every day I
go about my
business in the
usual way

And it helps to
just pretend you've
never really
been away

it's not that I don't
understand the
way that it can
sometimes be

But I never
thought that you
would suddenly be
taken from me

I see reminders
all the time of
things you used to
love to do

And no matter
where or when
I feel like I'm right
there with you

But although I'd
move the earth
for reasons only
hearts can know

To get you back
again I realize
I had to
let you do

Every day
I go about
my work without
a lot to say

Driving home
I surf the radio
for something
else to play

And nothing seems to
matter much
at least not like
it used to do

Until it dawns
upon me somehow
I will always
be with you

Close Encounter

Azalea time at Kenwood.

But inside,
out of the rain,

I lift

the cloth protecting

the contents of

the glass display-case

from the sun,
to find, on loan
from the

National Portrait Gallery,
her sister Cassandra's shell-white,

original water-color of

Jane Austen ----

It would fit in my pocket,
like a handkerchief .

She sits there quietly:

white-clad, mob capped,
with curls,

looking out of the round-eyes that

miss nothing;

Smaller than the Smallest . . .

She shows me
some jet-black
cellosia seeds
from a packet -

polished grains
I have to raise
my bifocals to see.

Their complex
miniscule geometry
catches the light.

Tiny dust-like
universes
as perfect as
curved sea-stones -

semi-distinguishable
from the night.

Weekday Service

I knelt
in St Anne's sacristy
in my ink-black cassock
and crisp white surplice
by the blinking console
that controlled
the church bells,
hidden behind
the slatted fold-out
wooden screen

as Father McHale
elevated
from the high altar
the Eucharistic host
above his head
and the few
working people there
at 7 a.m. mass
bowed and blessed themselves

and the other server
shook the handbells
my cue to press
button number 4

once
with its flashing
red and green lights

but my arm
haphazardly
fell across
the dazzling panel
as I nodded off
shamefully
triggering
the whole row
of electronic sounds
from low to high
like a hyper-chorus
that rang out
all over Garwood
near and far
for all to hear

as the priest,
hands raised,
looked
around the side
(to the nook
where I knelt)
mystified.

Showing

a glowing
curve
of undiluted color
--one leg over
on Cherry Street,
and the other
hovering
above
the fiercely green
campus
quadrangle--
(the perfect ending)
as I give
my evening
Shakespeare exam.
I would love
to tell all my students
to look up!
but witness
all the beauty
there is
as they,
labor away,
silently
.

No. 2

to think of how we lay
 on your plastic raincoat on the pine needles
 below the Seton Hill grounds . . .
 when you say it sounds like "them"
 it hurts .
 Just some mood?

the mosquitos--mosquito bites
 on your forehead and cheek
 your long hair will
 conceal .

After we leave these woods.

Always

I hold you
in my arms
so no harm
comes to you

Your breath as
light and easy
as a falling leaf

it's home
wherever
we're together
rain or shine

here or there
in any
kind of
weather's fine

If I had
three wishes
I would
use them all

to keep you
here beside
me always
safe and warm

Big Event

3
suns
in
one

a
rare
phenomenon

emerging out of
January
silence,

called
a Parhelion
in the textbooks

with luminous spots
22° to each side
and at
the same elevation.
There

in the
freezing
cold
air

above
the corn stubble
and
snow,

they all glow
within
a rainbow bubble--
a natural
triptych
to the eye.

Such a sight!
the crystal optics
of the
tripartite nature
of pure light.

No title 1.

the spare rooms

where I discarded any reasons,

and

got behind

the gross forms of things

by seeing what they were for myself.

i put touches--fingers between
the wrinkles.

--it was as though I'd given

you

skin .

May Queen

I remember the blossoms
that grew on the quince

in the backyard
by the picket fence.

My mother helped me
bend the wire
and thread them around it
one after another.

As I carried it
full of relief
in a moist plastic bag
to St. Anne's school

to sit on the statue
that faced us in class

the whole sky was flying
over the trees.

**Last Summer
(3 Mitchell Place)**

My Dad
in plaid
Bermuda shorts
balances,
on the rooftop,
his feet apart,
painting
the dormer
with a brush
from a Sears
latex can.

Below,
Nancy
dowses
the walls
with the hose,
while Mom
swipes and wipes
surfaces
clean
with a big yellow
sponge.

Out back
I
scrape
moldy grunge
from
the stucco
one-car
garage
on a wobbly
ladder.

I found
dusty beer bottles,
empties,
in the small hutch
cut roughly
into my attic room—
and there are
plenty
of cigarette butt burns

on the parlor
carpeting,
no doubt
left by the lady
real estate owner.

But there's nothing
outside
now
except
white house
and
blue sky—

as we all
work together
smiling
in the sunlight
to make
the two-story "cape"

that my family
just bought
back in Jersey
bright.

Before
my Dad
returns to
his out-of-state
job
for Kopper's.

**Nancy's Summer Update
on the Twins**

Chris is
halfway
through a 2-week
Science Camp.

It's 3 hours a day
and he's totally
into it.

Every day
is a different
branch
of science.

Every day
he comes home
with things
he's made:

a volcano,
a prism,

shadow puppets,
bongo drum,

a collage
of
animal fir
and snakeskin
.

They have

demonstrations
and visitors

at camp

every day
and
somedays
when Gregs
and I pick him up
they are still there.
I handled a
tarantula,
a
snake
and
a
millipede
last week
to show
what a good
sport
I am
.

World upon World

The colors of the hand-painted
photo of Guru Dev
that came stamped "overseas mail"
 from New Delhi-
like crepe myrtle,
Himalayan poppies,
and orange cosmos
--match the terrains
and seas
curving
on my Crams' Imperial Globe.
Sitting behind it on the cabinet
 in my study.
The continents as if tossed surpassingly
around his shoulders like a world-wide garland.

P.S.

The squeak of Ringo's shoe
on the four-track overdubs
of the finale
of
"A Day in the Life"
like an audio palimpsest
in the
the closing seconds
of the receding
monumental chord
banged on
multiple keyboards:
a chorus of grand Steinways,
an out-of-tune Honky Tonk piano
and an old harmonium
backed up
against the wall
so the acoustics wouldn't be heard--

the sound of the big bang itself
like a figment
since the slider
was pushed up
from zero volume
just after the colossal G

was struck
on cue
by one and all,

but that
mouse-like squeal
of a rubber soul
(and the swoosh of the studio AC)
lingers like a tell-tale nose

on a
Matisse or Vermeer
bringing
the everyday
up into the sublime.

"Ribbon and number":

the rudiments of the lightning bug's
flickering secret language.

The seemingly random
ballet
of males and females
weightlessly blinking
out back.

It reminds me

of that especially
humid summer
in Athens, Ohio when we saw

thousands
filling
the neighborhood trees

nightly, and suddenly flashing
in a far more
brilliant unison,

like a bio-electric Christmas.

They deck my memories
like loosely hanging strings
of lights,

the magical yellow-green bodies.--

But now, I see
as they flicker and fade, in the
palpable silence,

how much watching them

flash

organically
is like
transcending all thoughts.

Invitation

an invitation came one day
to pack my things and move away
to a perfect place
with lots of space
so I took up my load
and headed down the road

but too well too well I saw the sun
sink from the sky when day was done
and I wished my little house was here
and I closed my eyes to calm my fear

I woke to see the sun shine clear
it seemed both far away and near
so I headed down the road again
and kept on going to the end

where I stood before a gleaming hall
that seemed everywhere and nowhere at all
and I soaked in all the light of day
until it never went away